THE ® saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

MAY
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Thirteenth Card
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Lady's Day at the Morgue
by CRAIG RICE

Happy Travellers
by EDGAR WALLACE

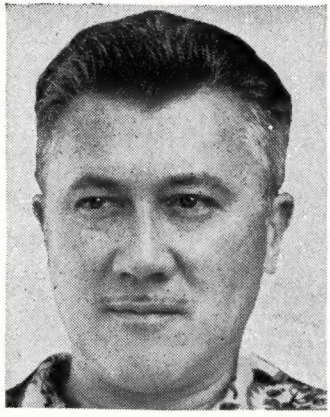
The Candid Corpse
by JAMES M. FOX

The Art Photographer
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

PUNCTUAL MURDERER
A NEW STORY by LOUIS GOLDING

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



JUST AS A certain type of jolting case-hardened crime story, which attained its finest flower in the pages of the old *Black Mask* and has been steadily debauched ever since, is an inherently American creation, and cannot be convincingly transplanted to any other soil, in spite of some strenuous efforts that have been made—so, I think, the classical atmospheric kind of mystery is only really at home in England, and never so well handled as in the dignified low-key style of an Englishman.

Perhaps this is because it takes little more than the magic name of London to recreate in imagination the world of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Thorndyke and Raffles, of gaslight and hansom cabs and fog—those wonderful adjuncts to suspense. True, there are automobiles and electricity today, but the taxis are sometimes decrepit and the power can be unreliable, and the fogs still come every winter, nourished by the smoke of innumerable coal fireplaces in parlors that a returning Holmes might not find at all puzzlingly modern. Perhaps the more delicate dark blooms of evil are starved on this century's bleak banks of sterile concrete; perhaps they can only flourish in little gray wilful streets that begin at random and make aimless turns and end for no special reason, in alleys full of shadowy corners and disdain for geometrical neatness, in buildings grown dingy with age that has also given them time to accumulate unguessable secrets. You are welcome to come up with a better theory, if you can, after reading THE PUNCTUAL MURDERER, and seeing how effectively the atmosphere of Pimlico and the Victoria Crescent Hotel and the three ladies who ran it is used by Louis Golding, a most distinguished English novelist in other genres, for whose graduation to the mystery field this magazine claims no little sponsorship.

Our other brand-new novelet this month is THE CANDID CORPSE, a worthy representation of the best American school, by James M. Fox, who already has more than a dozen hard-cover books to his credit. Edgar Wallace and E. Phillips Oppenheim riposte with some more of the English touch, albeit with some Continental seasoning; but Craig Rice comes in again for the U. S. A. However, the Saint's own performance this time, I fear, is back in London once more, which may make this issue seem a bit loaded on the jolly old British side. You should be grateful for such a change from what you have to look at on TV.

Cordwainer Smith

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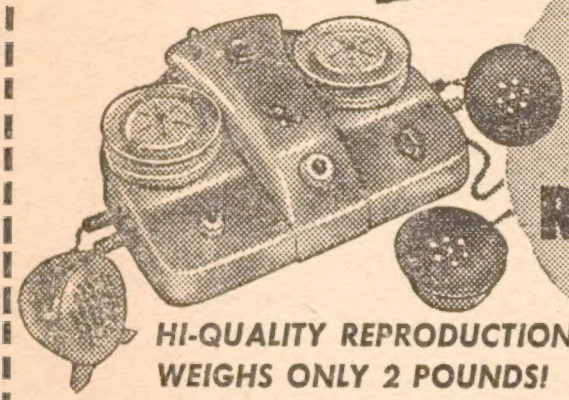

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THE ® saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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punctual murderer

by . . . Louis Golding

His eyes were blank and unfamiliar as he stared at the frightened woman. Then the face contorted with hatred.

IT WAS in the "Ladies Only" carriage from York to London that the three ladies met Mrs. Huxtable and their destiny, and their destiny was a boarding-house in Pimlico. Nothing was farther from the thoughts of the three ladies than to take over a boarding-house, in Pimlico or anywhere else. Prudence Chimney, the eldest of them, was going to live in a very small flat in Marylebone, on her small income. She didn't know what she was going to do there, but she would at least be near her younger sister, little Hazel, who was going to be companion-secretary to a rich old woman in Bryanston Square. And she would not be too far, either, from Joan Irwin, their cousin, who was going to keep the books for a remote relative, a sports outfitter in Holborn.

All three of them were chilled and frightened by the prospect that stretched before them.

Prudence did not want to live alone, though she was a big woman and could well have looked after herself. Hazel did not want to be anybody's companion-secretary. Joan would have faint-

---

Louis Golding, distinguished British novelist, has been translated into most languages. Author of more than 50 books, he is best known here as the author of MR. EMMANUEL *and of* MAGNOLIA STREET, *which sold in the millions. His* LITTLE OLD ADMIRAL *will be published this Spring by Vanguard Press.*

ed with disgust if anyone should have asked her the price of an athlete's strap. They wanted to be together. They had been together for years and years, looking after old Mr. Chimney, the father of Prudence and Hazel, the uncle of Joan.

But he was dead at last. The house near York had gone. Everything had gone. And the three ladies had to earn a living. And they were on their way to King's Cross to start again, or rather to start for the first time, and somewhat late in life.

There, in the "Ladies Only" carriage, as I have said, they met Mrs. Huxtable. Mrs. Huxtable was a warm and friendly creature, and an energetic one. Although she sat more or less immobile in her seat, she gave you the impression she was rotating on her axis. She had large brown eyes in which you melted. She had a voice that carried you away, like a ball of screwed-up paper in running water.

In twenty-five minutes she found out everything there was to find out about the Misses Chimney and Miss Irwin, their long untroubled past, their troubled immediate future. In forty-five minutes she had sold them the Victoria Crescent Hotel, in Pimlico; for one of the things she had learned was the fact that, at a pinch, the ladies could raise twenty-two hundred pounds.

The day was Friday. The deal had to be settled by Saturday noon at the latest, the hour when lawyers close their offices. Mrs. Huxtable was flying to Kenya on Monday, where her daughter was going to have an operation two or three days later. The daughter would never be well again. She would need her darling mother as never before. A tear, large as a cherry, rolled down Mrs. Huxtable's cheek.

The three ladies knew nothing at all about running a boarding-house, nothing. But where is the maiden lady who is not convinced that if she was born with any talent at all it is the talent of running a boarding-house? They had rarely, if ever, stayed in a boarding-house. They did not know where Pimlico was.

But what a heaven-sent opportunity! No cantankerous old lady for little Hazel, who preferred to spend her time looking after her own pretty dresses and exquisite hands. No beastly ledgers and boxing-gloves for Joan. No lonely flat for Prudence. And the three of them could be together, always, as they had been for so long. And they could be so kind and helpful to the guests, a home from home. The guests would be their brothers and sisters. Late at night and first thing in the morning they would come down to the private kitchen and make tea. Not at five o'clock, mark you. That time would be sacred to specially invited guests.

They were dreaming away, chattering away, like a kettle on the hearth. Mrs. Huxtable let them dream. But if a moment came when they looked like emerging from their dream and asking a practical question, Mrs. Huxtable was at them again, the large eyes rolling in their sockets, the urgent voice drumming and throbbing away.

That night, Mrs. Huxtable invited the three ladies to dinner. She was charming. She had breakfast with them. By nine-thirty she had taken them to Pimlico to see the hotel. She would not want them, she explained, to buy a pig in a poke. It was a fair-sized place, and all the other houses in the Crescent were hotels or boarding-houses. The rooms were a bit on the shabby side, but what fun it would be finding bits and pieces and brightening things up! The place was full for, after all, it was wartime. There were several young Service people about, with their wives.

By ten-thirty the four of them were at Mrs. Huxtable's lawyer. By eleven-forty-five, a few telephone calls having been made, the deal was done, the documents signed. The three ladies had taken legal possession of the Victoria Crescent Hotel. On Monday morning, by ten o'clock, they were formally installed.

It should be said at once, Mrs. Huxtable was not a swindler. Whether the daughter and the operation and Kenya had anything to do with it or not, she wanted quick results and when Heaven put the three ladies in her lap she pounced. The hotel was worth the money, though the three ladies saw on the Monday that there would be much more to do brightening the place up than they had realized.

Some of the guests were a little puzzling, too. Were not some of these Service-folk awfully young to be married? But it was wartime, after all, and that is a time when young people do not wait. And weren't one or two of the wives . . . how would you call it? . . . just a little highly colored? Perhaps, yes. But we must learn to be broad-minded, insisted Prudence, the large and confident one. This is London, not York, and it's *wartime*.

A really shocking thing happened that first night. There was a ring at the door quite late, about eleven-thirty. (It was Joan's late night. They had already arranged the times between them.) When Joan opened the door an American soldier was standing there, swaying. He was clearly the worse for drink. But that was not all. There was a woman with him, also drunk, and painted up to the eyebrows. Now Joan had a suspicion what this was about.

"What do you want?" she asked shortly. (Inside, her heart was knocking like a hammer.)

"I wanna room for'n hour," said the American soldier. He had one foot in the door.

"Go away," ordered Joan.

"Look!" said the soldier. He took out a thick wad of notes from his pocket. "How much d'you want, honeybunch? All the other places full up. Just one hour."

"Go away or I'll call the police!" said Joan.

"Come on, Yank!" said the soldier's lady friend. "Let's beat it! You old cow!" she said, addressing Joan. Then they went off.

At twelve o'clock, as arranged, Joan went up to her bed, where she had a good cry. It was nasty, but it might not happen again, not for a long time. Anyhow, they were all together now, all three of them, Prudence and Hazel and she. They were going to remain together. She smiled through her tears. It would be a hard job, but they were going to make a success of this hotel. There was evidently room for a nice place in Victoria Crescent, run by three ladies. She set her chin and clenched her fist. And so she fell asleep.

The three ladies, it can be seen, were nothing if not respectable. It could be said of them they were innocent, but it could not be said they were stupid. They were thoroughly aware before twenty-four hours had passed that they had taken up their abode in a dubious street in a dubious section of Pimlico. That night, with little Hazel, the episode repeated itself.

This time it was not an American; it was a Pole. He did not hold up a wad of notes for bait but a pair of silk stockings. Hazel was, at least to look at, the frailest of the three. She was pretty, with forget-me-not eyes and a gold shimmer in her hair, and hands as dainty as rosebuds. But she sent that Pole packing with something of the asperity of a sergeant-major. The lady friend was reduced to total silence.

"If it happens to me," said Prudence, the gray-haired one, who had rather large feet and who could stand no nonsense, "I'll ring up the police."

It happened to Prudence, and Prudence rang up the police. She gave an account of what had been happening, and asked if there was anything that could be done about it. Her voice boomed quite fiercely down the telephone. The reply was slightly jocular:

"Suppose *you'd* been doin' three months 'ard on Salisbury Plain! 'Ave a 'eart, Madame, 'ave a 'eart!"

It was to be deduced the arm of the law was not likely to bestir itself.

But the three ladies had no doubt at all about the sort of hotel they wished to run, and it was astonishing how soon it became that sort of hotel, flanked

and faced though it was by hotels of the most tolerant sort. In a week or two the last dubious couples had departed; they could not stand up against eyes so innocent and forthright as the eyes of the three ladies. The moment you rang the bell, and were admitted, an odor unique in Victoria Crescent came to your nostrils, composed of lavender and toasted scones and soap scrubbed into corners.

The months went by. A year or two went by. The war was over now. The front was given a fresh coat of paint, at once demure and cool. There were bright flowers in window-boxes and a striped awning to let down over the front door.

You could almost imagine that you were in a side street in York, rather than in the heart of London, no distance from Victoria Station.

But that is, of course, a very convenient location, what with Parliament not far off, and the Abbey, and the School, and various other institutions not so important. The sort of people connected with that sort of institution began to patronize the Victoria Crescent Hotel in increasing numbers. It was not only convenient, it was so warm and cozy, without being in the least lax, a "home from home"—in fact, as the three ladies had wanted it to be from the beginning.

Meeting in the kitchen at night and making your own tea became quite an institution.

The guests came and went, and recommended the hotel to their friends. Some came and did not go. They became "permanents": not too many of them, for "transients" are more profitable, and the hotel was, after all, not only a home, but a business. But the "permanents" were hand picked, they were from the top drawer. The better public schools, the Church, the county families, were frequently represented in that small, choice company, the paladins of five o'clock tea in the ladies' own sitting-room, amid the gold-framed water-colors and the shining brassware.

It was undoubtedly Mr. Vinnery who bestowed on the Victoria Crescent Hotel its steadiest and brightest lustre, though the statement has to be made that on the day of his arrival, the lustre was less bright and steady than it should have been.

Perhaps Mr. Vinnery had a cold, and colds upset people queerly sometimes. Perhaps someone had naughtily slipped a noggin of gin into his ginger-ale at lunch. (He turned up in the middle of the afternoon.) The fact is that on his way upstairs to be shown his room, with Prudence going just ahead of him, he happened to brush up against little Hazel, who was going down.

"I beg your pardon," he said

politely, turning his face towards her. Then his jaw dropped, and hung loosely for a moment or two. He stood stock still. Then he started muttering. It was only a single word, like "race," perhaps. Or, maybe, it was "Grace," the name of a woman or a small girl. Neither Hazel nor Prudence could get it, though they were so close. Then the strangeness went off as quickly as it had appeared. His gait as he followed up after Prudence was quite jaunty. The mild twinkle was in his eye again.

Nothing like that happened again. According to Joan, who had not been there, it had not happened at all. "Grace!" she laughed. "The only Grace the old dear ever knew was something in a pulpit, not a petticoat!"

For Mr. Vinnery was a Nonconformist, and had even been, it was said, a lay preacher. But he *had* been a Cabinet Minister, and that is lustre enough for anybody. He became (if the expression is not offensive) the prize exhibit of the Victoria Crescent Hotel, though the ladies were far too well bred to do anything so vulgar as to exhibit anyone. But he gave its distinctive cachet to the home-from-home, and he was so friendly, in his own quiet way, his eyes glinting amiably behind his spectacles. He read a good deal. He was still interested in missions to the heathen. He was altogether nice and comfortable to have about the place.

And then, May the fifteenth came round. The first May the fifteenth, that is, during the residence of Mr. Vinnery at Victoria Crescent. The three ladies remembered the date partly because that was the date for renewing the insurance, and partly because of Mr. Vinnery himself.

Mr. Vinnery did not come down to breakfast that morning. That was in itself an unusual thing. Mr. Vinnery *always* came down to breakfast, and very punctually, too. He was very punctual about his breakfast-time, and the time he devoted to his constitutional, his letter-writing, his books, his newspaper. He had been just like that with the measures he had introduced as Cabinet Minister.

And Mr. Vinnery was not down for breakfast.

"It's very odd, isn't it?" commented Hazel plaintively to Prudence. Joan was not down yet. It was the morning for Joan's stop-in-bed. The three ladies each in turn allowed themselves a morning stop-in-bed. "It's the first time, isn't it? He's always been down, even Sundays," added Hazel.

"Yes," said Prudence, coming back still once again from the hatch, where she stood supervising operations, like a captain on his bridge. "No one is left here except Number Eight. Mr. Vinnery can't be coming down. I

wonder if he's not well. I'll go up and see."

"No, darling," said Hazel firmly, pursing her pretty lips. "Not with that foot of yours." (There had been an ankle sprained lately on those dark basement stairs.) "I'll go. I'll tell him he must have his breakfast in bed. And he can have a doctor, too. Isn't it lucky Number Eleven is a doctor?"

"A doctor of *philosophy,* my dear," observed Prudence. "All right, Hazel. Go up and see."

So Hazel went up and saw. But before she saw, she heard. She *thought* she heard as she was going along the passage towards Mr. Vinnery's room, but she was not sure. Then, as she stood outside his door, she realized there was no doubt at all. Mr. Vinnery was crying. He was crying as if his heart would break, as if it was already broken. It was less a crying than a low deep moaning, like a dog kicked and abandoned by its master.

Hazel stood with her knuckles an inch from the panel of the door; she stood there from one minute to the next, and still she did not knock. She felt a dampness start on her forehead. Her neck twitched under the ash-blonde hair.

"Don't be an idiot!" Hazel told herself. "The poor old man's got toothache or something. That's the way it takes him. He cries."

She knocked. There was no reply. She knocked again. There was still no reply. The moaning did not cease.

"There's nothing else for it," said Hazel. This time she talked aloud, for after all, this was a *man,* though an old one, whose bedroom she proposed to enter, unbidden. She turned away towards the wall. He was huddled up, his knees as close as he could bring them to his chin. His fists were in his eyes. The impression was very much as of a hurt child.

"Mr. Vinnery!" Hazel called out. Had he heard this time? Was there a slackening in the crying? Was it continuing as before?

"Mr. Vinnery!" Hazel called out again, this time quite loud.

The crying stopped. Mr. Vinnery turned round in his bed. He removed his clenched fists from before his eyes. The eyes, curiously blank and unfamiliar, stared in the direction of the open door, the sound that had been uttered, the woman who had uttered it. Then gradually the eyes filled with an awareness, whether the thing they were aware of was or was not there. The face contorted with hatred, the upper lip pulling away quite dreadfully from the left side of the upper teeth. The hands groped blindly around and above the bed as if they were seeking some deadly implement to hurl at the image that had formed itself there, in the open doorway.

Then words issued from under

Mr. Vinnery's pulled-back lip.

"You!" he cried. "*You!* Get out, *get out,* you bitch!"

Like a shadow, quickly, quietly, Hazel stepped across the threshold, pulling the door to after her. There she stood swaying for a moment or two, not knowing whether she was going to faint or be sick. But she did neither. She looked like Dresden china, but she had stamina. She took herself in hand and walked firmly down the stairs. But the moment she got into the sitting-room, stamina or no stamina, she put her hand up to her face and burst into tears.

"Darling!" cried Prudence. "Darling, what is the matter? Has anyone . . . has anyone been rude?"

"Hazel, dear, pull yourself together!" requested Joan, who had just come downstairs.

"The poor thing!" sobbed Hazel. "The poor, poor thing!" Her only feeling was pity for Mr. Vinnery. She knew he was not responsible.

"Anything the matter with Mr. Vinnery?" asked Joan.

"He has not been down to breakfast, Joan," Prudence explained, "and Hazel went up to see."

Hazel told exactly what had happened, excepting that she couldn't bring herself to utter that odious last word. She was terribly grieved, but above all she was puzzled. "What's it all *about?*" Hazel asked piteously. "What does it *mean?* Poor, dear Mr. Vinnery!"

"I think I know," said Prudence, tight-lipped. (She was really very sensible, Prudence.) "The fact is—you must have reminded him of some woman, sometime in his life. She broke his heart, I mean. You remember, he uttered a name like Grace the first day he came. It may have been something in your face, Hazel, or just something in your voice. It brought her back to him."

"But why today?" asked Hazel. "He's . . . He's always been so polite in his nice, quiet way."

"What's the date?" asked Joan. She looked up at the calendar. "Oh, yes, May the fifteenth. The day the insurances fall due. That's the day it happened"—she was quite positive—"the thing Prudence is talking about. The treachery. This Grace ran away with another man. Or perhaps he surprised them together." It was evident that Joan was drawing a certain amount of pleasure out of her speculating. She was quite ready to accept Grace now as a working proposition.

"Yes, yes," interrupted Prudence. "That must have been a long time ago. What are we going to do *now*?"

"I *do* hope you won't send him away, will you?" begged Hazel. "He looked so awfully pitiful,

screwed up there in his bed like a small boy."

Prudence thought. Joan got out the cheque book. Hazel sniffed.

"Perhaps it won't happen again," said Prudence.

"I'm sure it won't," said Hazel, and she was the one who had been insulted. She was a generous little creature.

"Look out for next May the fifteenth," cautioned Joan drily.

"Have you telephoned the fishmonger, Hazel?" asked Prudence. "You know how quickly he sells out!" That was how the matter of Mr. Vinnery was left for the time being.

Nothing happened all that day. About teatime, Hazel, a little tentatively, suggested that the daily woman might take Mr. Vinnery up a cup of tea. "I don't think, perhaps, I ought to myself," she added, "unless you think it will be all right."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Prudence. "Not you, nor Mrs. Tate, nor anybody. Let it work out of his system."

"He'll be as right as rain tomorrow," pronounced Joan. "He'll be down for breakfast, and fit as a fiddle." (It was generally agreed that Joan was a first-rate psychologist.)

And Joan was right. Mr. Vinnery *was* down for breakfast, and fit as a fiddle.

"Good morning, my dears," he said, twinkling behind his spectacles. "Fish today, is it? Splendid! Splendid!" He must have talked like that in the days when a good speech of his had sent the Opposition scuttling. It was clear he had not the faintest knowledge of what had happened the day before. He did not seem to be aware that for him there had been no day; it had slipped through his fingers like a raindrop that alights on a wet pavement, and might never have been there.

Joan smiled. She winked, too. She was pleased she had been proved right. The wink meant, of course: "There you are, didn't I tell you?" Prudence nodded. Hazel nodded. Dear Joan was really very good at this psychology. Mr. Vinnery ate a hearty breakfast, and set off on his constitutional.

"But I . . . I can't understand," breathed Hazel. "Perhaps it did not happen at all? Perhaps I was dreaming." They could see Mr. Vinnery through the window, striding down the Crescent like a footballer.

"Not at all," said Joan firmly. "The subconscious mind plays some very strange tricks." She talked about it just the least bit as if it were a performing poodle.

"It will be all right, won't it, Prudence?" said Hazel. "Our doing nothing about it, I mean."

"It'll be all right, I think," Prudence assented.

It was all right that day, that

week, that month. All the rest of the months that year were all right. The Victoria Crescent Hotel acquired new stair carpets. A bishop came and went, severely indifferent to the type of lady he rubbed shoulders with as he walked up the street towards the hotel and down the street away from it. Mr. Vinnery continued to shed his unemphatic lustre upon the scene.

April ended. May began. The morning of May the fifteenth came round again.

It was, as it happened, Joan's turn for stop-in-bed once again, as it had been the morning of a year ago, but she came down. She liked being proved right, a pardonable failing, and she was. Mr. Vinnery did not come down for breakfast.

"You see?" said Joan. "Shall I tell you what's happening now? He's hunched up in his bed thinking of Grace and he's crying his eyes out."

"Shall I go up and see?" asked Hazel, which was not very wise of her. She was by way of feeling that Mr. Vinnery was her own special charge.

"Certainly not!" cried Prudence. "I'll go!"

"So will I!" said Joan.

The two ladies went upstairs. With great caution they advanced along the new stair carpet towards Mr. Vinnery's door. There the sound was, very low, very faint, but oh, how heartbreaking.

"Poor old man!" breathed Prudence, the tender mouth belying the somewhat hard chin. "Come, Joan. We must leave him to it. There's nothing we can do, nothing."

"Nothing!" echoed Joan. "*Isn't* it sad!" There were tears in the eyes of both ladies as they went downstairs again.

Twelve months went by once more. Once more it was May the fifteenth. This year the ladies did not even lay Mr. Vinnery's place for breakfast, at that special table for him near the fireplace. They knew he wouldn't be down, and he was not down.

"I think I'll just go and make sure," whispered Joan. She went off and came back a few minutes later. She nodded and shrugged her shoulders. "Ah, well," sighed Hazel. "That's how it is!"

The three ladies did not give Mr. Vinnery another thought. It was after all a routine now. Mr. Vinnery would be down for breakfast as usual next morning, not quite so alert as he had been a year or two ago, for he was getting on now. But he would be down all right, the sun shining on his spectacles.

"Porridge, my dears?" he would ask. "With cream? That cream you make up so cleverly. How do you do it, my dears?"

May the fifteenth came round for the fourth time since it had become signalized by something

more than the signing of the check for the insurances. Mr. Vinnery did not come down for breakfast. Of course he did not. The ladies did not expect him to come down for breakfast on the morning of May the fifteenth; or for lunch or tea for that matter.

Hazel did not come down for breakfast, either. That was fit and proper, too. It was Hazel's turn for stop-in-bed. It was half-past nine, now. It was ten o'clock. She was usually down by ten o'clock. (It was understood that no one disturbed anyone on the morning you stayed in bed. If you wanted a cup of tea, you made one for yourself, on your own little electric kettle. But nobody fussed about bringing people breakfast. The idea was you were to have your sleep out.)

But you were generally up for ten o'clock. Certainly you practically never stayed in bed as late as eleven o'clock. And it was ten minutes past eleven, now. Prudence looked at Joan. Joan looked at Prudence. They looked uneasy, both of them.

"She'll be down soon," said Prudence. "Poor dear, I thought she looked very tired last night." But even as she spoke, she was moving towards the door. "She shouldn't be as late as this. I'm going up."

Without a word, Joan rose and followed her. They went up the first staircase, then up the second. The way to Hazel's room led beyond Mr. Vinnery's door. Prudence was leading the way. She turned and placed her finger on her lips.

"Listen!" her mouth went.

Both ladies stopped and listened. There was no sound from Mr. Vinnery's room, no sound at all. It was frighteningly quiet, much more frightening than the moaning they had heard issue from that room last year, and the year before, and the year before that.

"Perhaps he's all right this time," murmured Joan. "It may have worked itself out. Maybe he's asleep."

"Yes, of course, he's asleep," repeated Prudence. They walked on, to the end of the passage, and around to the left along the little lobby where Hazel's room was.

"Quiet!" said Prudence suddenly. "What's that?" A sound issued from Hazel's room, but it was not the sort of sound you associated with her room, or her. It was the sound of a low, faint moaning, and it was a man's voice you heard, not a woman's.

A moment later, Prudence had flung the door open.

"Hazel!" she screamed. "Hazel! Hazel!"

But Hazel could not hear her, for she was dead. She lay strangled on her bed, a scarf round her throat. The scarf belonged to Mr. Vinnery who was also in the room, sitting bent forward in a chair some feet from Hazel's bed.

"Hazel! Hazel!" the two ladies

whimpered, untying the scarf, chafing the bruised throat, the cold hands. "Hazel! Hazel!" But it was useless.

Then they turned to Mr. Vinnery. The tears were rolling down his cheeks in a thick stream. His eyes were completely aware, completely sane, though a grief so monstrous sat in them, that even in that moment of desolation and fury, the two ladies were forced to turn their eyes away.

"Miss Prudence! Miss Joan!" He addressed them each in turn, though he did not look at them. The eyes stared straight before him. "What have I done? I thought it was *her*, Grace. And it isn't. It's Miss Hazel, poor, dear, sweet Miss Hazel!"

There was a moment's silence, then: "Oh, Lord God, who redeemed all men else, have no pity on me!" he cried in a loud voice; and his head fell on his chest, and he sat there motionless, except for the hands opening and shutting and opening again, like the wings of some great moth already half dead.

NEXT MONTH—

Two very wealthy men are poisoned in
G. K. Chesterton's THE CRIME OF THE COMMUNIST

The unusual Lord Driver is frustrated in
Graham Greene's WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

Albert Campion investigates a "1835" brandy in
Margery Allingham's THE CASE OF THE WIDOW

A magistrate in the Solomons interferes in
Murray Leinster's DEATH IN THE JUNGLE

An Amish farmer is accused in
Lloyd Eshbach's MURDER BY HEX

Jim Hanvey frustrates some con men in
Octavus Roy Cohen's MAGNIFICENT LIAR

and

Simon Templar discovers that the adage about the deadliness of the female is all too true in FAST WOMEN, A New Saint Story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in *The Saint*

the art photographer

by . . . Leslie Charteris

"IT BECOMES increasingly obvious," said the Saint, "that the time has arrived when we shall have to squash Mr. Gilbert Tanfold."

He did not utter this prophecy within the hearing of Mr. Tanfold, for that would have been a gesture of a kind in which Simon Templar indulged more rarely now than he had once been wont to do. If the time had arrived when the squashing of Mr. Tanfold became a public service which no altruistic freebooter could refuse to perform, the time had also passed when the squashing could be carried out with full theatrical honors, with a haloed drawing on a plain card left pinned to the resultant blob of grease to tell the world that Simon Templar had been there. There was too much interest in his activities at Scotland Yard for anything like that to be entered upon without an elaborate preparation of alibis, which was rather more trouble than he thought Mr. Tanfold was worth. But the ripeness for squashing, the *zerquetschenreiflichkeit,* if we may borrow a word which the English language so unhappily lacks, of Mr. Gilbert Tanfold, even if it could not be made a public cere-

Simon had a lively appreciation for most forms of art; but this one went a little too far. . . .

Gilbert Tanfold went home that evening, his heart singing the happy song of a vulture nearing a tasty morsel—unaware that he had met the Saint.

From: THE SAINT INTERVENES.
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mony, could not be overlooked altogether for any such trivial reason.

The advertisements of Mr. Tanfold appeared in the back pages of several appropriate journals, and were distinguished by their prodigality of exclamation marks and their unusual vagueness of content. The specimen which was answered by a certain Mr. Tombs was fairly typical.

PARISIAN ART PHOTOS!

RARE! EXTRAORDINARY!! *Special Offer!* (Cannot be repeated!) 100 unique poses, 3/6 post free. Exceptional rarities, 10/-, 15/-, £1, £5 each!! Also

BOOKS!!!!

all editions, curiosities, eroticæ, etc.! "Garden of Love" (very rare) 10/6. Send for illustrated catalogue and samples!!!

G. TANFOLD & CO.,
Gaul St., Birmingham.

It was an advertisement which regularly brought in a remarkable amount of business, considering that it left so much to the imagination; but certain imaginations are like that.

The imagination of Mr. Gilbert Tanfold, however, soared far above the ordinary financial possibilities of this commonplace catering to pornography. If ever there was a man who did not believe in Art for Art's sake, this man walked the earth with his ankles enveloped in the spats of Mr. Gilbert Tanfold. Where any other man trading in these artistic lines would have been content with the generous profit from the sale of his "exceptional rarities," Mr. Tanfold had made them merely stepping-stones to bigger things; which was one of the reasons for his tempting *zerquetschenreiflichkeit* aforesaid.

Every letter which came to his cheap two-roomed office in Birmingham was examined with an interest that would have astonished the unsuspecting writer. Those which, by inferior notepaper, cheaply printed letterheads, and/or clumsy handwriting, branded their authors as persons of no great substance, merely had their orders filled by return, as specified; and that, so far as Mr. Tanfold was concerned, was the end of them. But those letters which, by expensive paper, die-stamped letterheads; and/or an educated hand, hinted at a client who really had no business to be collecting rude pictures or "curiosities," came under the close scrutiny of Mr. Tanfold himself; and their orders were merely the beginning of many other things.

Mr. Tombs wrote on the notepaper of the Palace Royal Hotel, London, which was so expensive

that only millionaires, film stars, and buccaneers could afford to live there; and it is a curious fact that Mr. Tanfold entirely forgot that third category of possible guests when he saw the letter. It must be admitted, in extenuation, that Simon Templar misled him. For as his profession (which all customers were asked to state with their order) he gave *"Businessman (Australian)."*

Mr. Gilbert Tanfold, like others of his ilk, had a sound working knowledge of the peculiar psychology of wealthy Colonials at large in London—of that open-hearted, almost pathetically guileless eagerness to be good fellows which leads them to buy gold bricks in the Strand, or to hand thousands of pounds in small change to two perfect strangers as evidence of their good faith—and he was so impressed with the potentialities of Mr. Tombs that he ordered the very choicest pictures in his stock to be included in the filling of the order, and made a personal trip to London the next day to find out more about this Heaven-sent bird from the bush.

The problem of making stealthy inquiries about a guest in a place like the Palace Royal Hotel might have troubled anyone less apt in the art of investigating prospective victims; but to Mr. Tanfold it was little more than a matter of routine, a case for Method C_4 (g). He knew that lonely men in a big city will always talk to a barman, and simply followed the same procedure himself. To a man as practiced as he was in the technique of drawing gossip out of unwitting informants, results came quickly. Yes, the barman at the Palace Royal knew Mr. Tombs.

"A tall dark gentleman with glasses—is that him?"

"That's him," agreed Mr. Tanfold glibly; and learned, as he had hoped, that Mr. Tombs was a regular and solitary patron of the bar.

It did not take him much longer to discover that Mr. Tombs's father was an exceedingly rich and exceedingly pious citizen of Melbourne, a loud noise in the Chamber of Commerce, an only slightly smaller noise in the local government, and an indefatigable guardian of public morality. He also gathered that Mr. Tombs, besides carrying on his father's business, was expected to carry on his moralizing activities also, and that this latter inheritance was much less acceptable to Mr. Tombs, Jr., than it should have been to a thoroughly well-brought-up young man. The soul of Sebastian Tombs II, it appeared, yearned for naughtier things: the panting of the psalmist's heart after the water-brooks, seemingly, was positively as no pant at all compared with the panting of the heart of Tombs *fils* after those spicy improprieties on which it was the devoted hobby of Tombs *père* to bring down all the weight of public indignation. The barman

knew this because the younger Tombs had sought his advice on the subject of wild-oat sowing in London, and had confessed himself sadly disappointed with the limited range of fields available to the casual sower. He was, in fact, living only for the day when the business which had brought him to England would be over, and he would be free to continue his search for sin in Paris.

Mr. Tanfold did not rub his hands gloatingly; but he ordered another drink, and when it had been served he laid a ten-pound note on the bar.

"You needn't bother about the change," he said, "if you'd like to do me a small favor."

The barman looked at the money, and picked it up. The only other customers at the bar at that moment were two men at the other end of the room, who were out of earshot.

"What can I do, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Tanfold put a card on the counter—it bore the name of a firm of private inquiry agents who existed only in his imagination.

"I've been engaged to make some inquiries about this fellow," he said. "Will you point him out to me when he comes in? I'd like you to introduce us. Tell him I'm another lonely Australian, and ask if he'd like to meet me—that's all I want."

The barman hesitated for a second, and then folded the note and put it in his pocket with a cynical nod. Mr. Tombs meant nothing to him, and ten pounds was ten pounds.

"That ought to be easy enough, sir," he said. "He usually gets here about this time. What name do I say?"

It was, as a matter of fact, almost ridiculously simple—so simple that it never occurred to Mr. Tanford to wonder why. To him, it was only an ordinary tribute to the perfection of his routine—it is an illuminating sidelight on the vanity of "clever" criminals that none of Simon Templar's multitudinous victims had ever paused to wonder whether perhaps someone else might not be able to duplicate their brilliantly applied psychology, and do it just a little better than they did.

Mr. Tombs came in at half-past six. After he had had a drink and glanced at an evening paper, the barman whispered to him. He looked at Mr. Tanfold. He left his stool and walked over. Mr. Tanfold beamed. The barman performed the requisite ceremony. "What'll you have?" said Mr. Tombs. "This is with me," said Mr. Tanfold.

It was as easy as that.

"Cheerio," said Mr. Tombs.

"Here's luck," said Mr. Tanfold.

"Lousy weather," said Mr. Tombs, finishing his drink at the second gulp.

"Well," said Mr. Tanfold,

"London isn't much of a place to be in at any time."

The blue eyes of Mr. Tombs, behind their horn-rimmed spectacles, focused on him with a sudden dawn of interest. Actually, Simon was assuring himself that any man born of woman could really look as unsavory as Mr. Tanfold and still remain immune to beetle-paste. In this he had some justification, for Mr. Gilbert Tanfold was a small and somewhat fleshy man with a loose lower lip and a tendency to pimples, and his natty clothes and the mauve shirts which he affected did not improve his appearance, though no doubt he believed they did. But the only expression which Mr. Tanfold discerned was that which might have stirred the features of a weeping Israelite by the waters of Babylon who perceived a fellow exile drawing nigh to hang his harp on an adjacent tree.

"You've found that too, have you?" said Mr. Tombs, with the morbid satisfaction of a hospital patient discovering an equally serious case in the next bed.

"I've found it for the last six months," said Mr. Tanfold firmly. "And I'm still finding it. No fun to be had anywhere. Everything's too damn respectable. I hope, I'm not shocking you—"

"Not a bit," said Mr. Tombs. "Let's have another drink."

"This is with me," said Mr. Tanfold.

The drinks were set up, raised, and swallowed.

"I'm not respectable," said Mr. Tanfold candidly. "I like a bit of fun. You know what I mean." Mr. Tanfold winked—a contortion of his face which left no indecency unsuggested. "Like you can get in Paris, if you know where to look for it."

"I know," said Mr. Tombs hungrily. "Have you been there?"

"Have I been there!" said Mr. Tanfold.

Considering the point later, the Saint was inclined to doubt whether Mr. Tanfold had been there, for the stories he was able to tell of his adventures in the Gay City were far more lurid than anything else of its kind which the Saint had ever heard—and Simon Templar reckoned that he knew Paris from the Champs-Élysées to the *fortifs*. Nevertheless, they served to pass the time very congenially until half-past seven, when Mr. Tanfold suggested that they might have dinner together and afterwards pool their resources in the quest for "a bit of fun."

"I've been here a bit longer than you," said Mr. Tanfold generously, "so perhaps I've found a few places you haven't come across."

It was a very good dinner washed down with liberal quantities of liquid, for Mr. Tanfold was rather proud of the hardness

of his head. As the wine flowed, his guest's tongue loosened—but there, again, it had never occurred to Mr. Tanfold that a tongue might be loosened simply because its owner was anxious that no effort should be spared to give its host all the information which he wanted to hear.

"If my father knew I'd been to Paris, I'm perfectly certain he'd disinherit me," Mr. Tombs revealed. "But he won't know. He thinks I'm sailing from Tilbury; but I'm going to have a week in Paris and catch the boat at Marseilles. He thinks Paris is a sort of waiting-room for hell. But he's like that about any place where you can have a good time. And five years ago he disowned a younger brother of mine just because he'd been seen at a night club with a girl who was considered a bit fast. Wouldn't listen to any excuses—just threw him out of the house and out of the business, and hasn't even mentioned his name since. That's the sort of puritan he is."

Mr. Tanfold made sympathetic noises with his tongue, while the area of flesh under the front of his mauve shirt which might by some stretch of imagination have been described as his bosom warmed with the glowing ecstasy of a dog sighting a new and hitherto undreamed-of lamp-post.

"When are you making this trip to Paris, old man?" he asked enviously.

"At the end of next week, I hope," said the unregenerate scion of the house of Tombs. "It all depends on how soon I can get my business finished. I've got to go to Birmingham on Friday to see some manufacturers, worse luck—and that'll probably be even deadlier than London."

Mr. Tanfold's head hooked forward on his neck, and his eyes expanded.

"Birmingham?" he ejaculated. "Well, I'm damned! What a coincidence?"

"Why, your going to Birmingham. And you think it's a deadly place! Haven't you ever heard of Gilbert Tanfold?"

Mr. Tombs nodded.

"Sells pictures, doesn't he? Yes, I've had some of 'em. I didn't think they were so hot."

Mr. Tanfold was so happy that this aspersion on his Art glanced off him like a pea off a tortoise.

"You can't have had any of his good ones," he said. "He keeps those for people he knows personally. I met him last week, and he showed me pictures . . ." Mr. Tanfold went into details which eclipsed even his adventures in Paris. "The coincidence is," he wound up, "that I've got an invitation to go to Birmingham on Friday myself and visit his studio."

Mr. Tombs swallowed so that his Adam's apple jiggered up and down.

"Gosh," he said jealously,

"that ought to be interesting. I wish I had your luck."

Tanfold's face lengthened commiseratingly, as if the thought that his new-found friend would be unable to share his good fortune had taken away all his enthusiasm for the project. And then, as if the solution had only just struck him, he brightened again.

"But why shouldn't you?" he demanded. "I said we'd pool our resources, and I ought to be able to arrange it. Now, suppose we go to Birmingham together—that is, if you don't think I'm thrusting myself on you too much—"

And that part also was absurdly easy; so that Mr. Gilbert Tanfold returned to his more modest hotel much later that night with his heart singing the happy song of a vulture diving on a particularly fruity morsel of carrion. He had not even had to devise any pretext to induce the simple Tombs to travel to Birmingham — Mr. Tombs had already planned the trip in his itinerary with a thoughtfulness which almost suggested that he had foreseen Mr. Tanfold's need. And yet, once again, this obvious explanation never occurred seriously to Gilbert Tanfold. He preferred to believe in miracles wrought for his benefit by a kindly Providence, which was a disastrous error for him to make.

The rest of his preparations proceeded with the same smoothness of routine. They went to Birmingham together on the Friday, and kept the steward busy on the Pullman throughout the journey. In Birmingham they had lunch together, diluted with more liquor. By the time they were ready for their visit to the studios of G. Tanfold & Co., Mr. Tanfold estimated that his companion was in an ideal condition to enjoy his experience. On arrival they were informed, most unveraciously, that urgent business had called Mr. Tanfold himself to London, but he had arranged that they should have the free run of the premises. The entertainment offered, it is sufficient to record, was one in which Mr. Tanfold believed he had surpassed himself as an impresario of impropriety.

Mr. Tombs, with remarkable fortune, was able to conclude his business on the Saturday morning, and returned to London on the Sunday. He announced his intention of leaving for Paris on the Tuesday, and they parted with mutual expressions of goodwill. Mr. Tanfold said that he himself would return to London on Monday, and they arranged to lunch together on that day and go on to paint the town red.

When Mr. Tanfold arrived at the Palace Royal Hotel a little before one o'clock on Monday, however, he did not have the air of a man who was getting set to experiment with what could be done

with a pot of red paint and the metropolitan skyline. Laying his hat and stick on the table and pulling off his lavender-tinted gloves in Mr. Tombs's suite, he was laconically unresponsive to the younger Tombs's effusive cries of welcome.

"Look here, Tombs," he said bluntly, when he had straightened his heliotrope tie, "there's something you'd better know."

"Tell me all, dear old wombat," said Mr. Tombs, who appeared to have acquired some of the frothier mannerisms of the city during his visit. "What have you done?"

"I haven't introduced myself properly," said his guest brazenly. "I am Gilbert Tanfold."

For a moment the antipodean Tomblet seemed taken aback; and then he grinned good-humoredly.

"Well, you certainly spruced me, Gilbert," he said. "What a joke! So it was really your own studio we went to!"

"Yes," said Mr. Tanfold grimly, "it was my own studio."

Mr. Tombs grinned again. He made remarks about Mr. Tanfold's unparalleled sense of humor in terms which were clearly designed to be flattering, but which were too biological in trend to be acceptable in mixed company. Mr. Tanfold, however, was not there to be flattered. He cut his host short with a flick of one well-manicured hand.

"Let's talk business," he said shortly. "I've got a photograph that was taken of you while you were at the studio."

Mr. Tombs's expression wavered uncertainly; and it may be mentioned that that waver was not the least difficult of the facial exercises which the Saint had had to go through during his acquaintance with Mr. Tanfold. For the expression which was at that moment spreading itself across Simon Templar's inside was a wholly different affair, which would have made the traditional Cheshire cat look like a mask of melancholy: even then, he had not outgrown the urchin glee of watching the feet of the ungodly planting themselves firmly on the banana-skin of doom.

Nevertheless, outwardly he wavered.

"Photograph?" he repeated.

Mr. Tanfold drew out his wallet, extracted a photograph therefrom, and handed it over. The Saint stared at it, and beheld his own unmistakable likeness, except for the horn-rimmed spectacles which were not a normal part of his attire, wrapped in a most undignified grapple with a damsel whose clothing set up its own standard of the irreducible minimum of diaphanous underwear.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "When was this taken?"

"You ought to remember," said Mr. Tanfold, polishing his fingernails on his coat lapel.

"But—but—" The first dim

inkling of the perils of the picture which he held seemed to dawn on Mr. Tombs, and he choked. "But this was an accident! You remember, Tanfold. They wanted her to sit on top of a step-ladder—they asked me to help her up—and I only caught her when she slipped—"

"I know," said Mr. Tanfold. "But nobody else does. You're the mug, Tombs. That photograph wouldn't look so good in a Melbourne paper, would it? With a caption saying: 'Son of prominent Melbourne businessman "holding the baby" at artists' revel in Paris' —or something like that."

Mr. Tombs swallowed.

"But I can explain it all," he protested. "It was—"

"Your father wouldn't listen to any explanations when your younger brother made a mistake, would he?" said Tanfold. "Besides, what were you doing in that studio at all? Take a look at where you are, Tombs, and get down to business. I'm here to sell you the negative of that picture —at a price."

The Saint's mouth opened.

"But that—that's blackmail!" he gasped.

"It doesn't bother me what you call it," Tanfold said smugly. "There's the position, and I want five thousand pounds to let you out of it."

Simon's eyes narrowed.

"Well, perhaps this'll bother you," he said; and a fist like a chunk of stone shot over and sent Tanfold sprawling into the opposite corner of the room. Mr. Tombs unbuttoned his coat. "Get up and come back for some more, you lousy crook," he invited.

Tanfold wiped his smashed lip with his handkerchief, and spat out a tooth. His small eyes went black and evil, but he did not get up.

"Just for that, it'll cost you ten thousand," he said viciously. "That stuff won't help you, you damn fool. Whatever you do, you won't get the plate back that way."

"It gives me a lot of fun, anyhow," said the Saint coldly. "And I only wish your miserable body could stand up to more of it."

He picked Mr. Tanfold up by the front of his mauve shirt with one hand, and slammed him back into the corner again with the other; and then he dropped into a chair by the table, pushed Mr. Tanfold's hat and stick on to the floor, and took out a check-book and a fountain pen. He made out the check with some care, and dropped that also on the floor.

"There's your money," he said, and watched the trembling Mr. Tanfold pick it up. "Now you can get out."

Mr. Tanfold had more things to say, but caught a glimpse of the unholy light in Mr. Tombs's mild blue eye, and changed his mind in the nick of time. He gathered up his hat and stick and got out.

In one of the washrooms of the hotel he repaired some of the damage that had been done to his natty appearance, and reflected malevolently that Mr. Tombs was somewhat optimistic if he thought he was going to secure his negative for a paltry ten thousand pounds after what had happened. In a day or two he would make a further demand—but this time he would take the precaution of doing it by telephone. With a photograph like that in his possession, Mr. Tanfold could see nothing to stop him bleeding his victim to the verge of suicide; and he was venomously prepared to do it.

He looked at the check again. It was made payable to Bearer, and was drawn on a bank in Berkeley Street. Ten minutes later he was passing it through the grille.

"Do you mind waiting a few moments, sir?" said the cashier. "I don't know whether we have enough currency to meet this without sending out."

Mr. Tanfold took a chair and waited, continuing his spiteful thoughts.

He waited five minutes. He waited ten minutes. Then he went to the counter again.

"We're a bit short on cash, sir," explained the cashier, "and it turns out that the bank we usually borrow from is a bit short too. We've sent a man to another branch, and he ought to be back any minute now."

A few moments later the clerk beckoned him.

"Would you step into the manager's office, sir?" he asked. "We don't like passing such a large sum as ten thousand pounds over the counter. I'll give it to you in there, if you don't mind."

Still unsuspecting, Mr. Tanfold stepped in the direction indicated. And the first person he saw in the office was the younger Tombs.

Mr. Tanfold stopped dead, and his heart missed several beats. A wild instinct urged him to turn and flee, but the strength seemed to have ebbed out of his legs. It would have availed him nothing, anyway; for the courteous clerk had slipped from behind the counter and followed him—and he was a healthy young heavyweight who looked as if he would have been more at home on a football field than behind the grille of a cashier's desk.

"Come in, Tanfold," said the manager sternly.

Mr. Tanfold forced himself to come in. Even then he did not see what could possibly have gone wrong—certainly he was unable to envisage any complication in which the photograph he held would not be a deciding factor.

"Are you the gentleman who just presented this check?" asked the manager, holding it up.

Tanfold moistened his lips.

"That's right," he said boldly.

"You were asked to wait," said

the manager, "because Mr. Tombs rang us up a short while ago and said that this check had been stolen from his book; and he asked us to detain anyone who presented it until he got here."

"That's an absurd mistake," Tanfold retorted loudly. "The check's made out to me—Mr. Tombs wrote it out himself only a few minutes ago."

The manager put his finger-tips together.

"I am familiar with Mr. Tombs's handwriting," he said dryly, "and this isn't a bit like it. It looks like a very amateurish forgery to me."

Mr. Tanfold's eyes goggled, and his stomach flopped down past the waistband of his trousers and left a sick void in its place. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. Whatever else he might have feared, he had never thought of anything like that; and for some seconds the sheer shock held him speechless.

In the silence, Simon Templar smiled—he had only recently decided that his *alter ego* had earned a bank account in its own name, and he did not know how he could have christened it better. He turned to the manager.

"Of course it's a forgery," he said. "But I don't want to be too hard on the man—that's why I asked you over the phone not to send for the police at once. I really believe there's some good in him. You can see from the clumsy way he tried to forge my signature that it's a first attempt."

"That's as you wish, of course, Mr. Tombs," said the manager doubtfully. "But—"

"Yes, yes," said the Saint, with a paralyzing oleaginousness that would have served to lubricate the bearings of a high-speed engine, "but I've spent a lot of time trying to make this fellow go straight and you can't deny me a last attempt. Let me take him home and talk to him for a while. I'll be responsible for him; and you and the cashier can still be witnesses to what he did if I can't make him see the error of his ways."

Mr. Tanfold's bouncing larynx almost throttled him. Never in all his days had he so much as dreamed of being the victim of such a staggering unblushing impudence. In a kind of daze, he felt himself being gripped by the arm; and a brief panorama of London streets swam dizzily through his vision and dissolved deliriously into the façade of the Palace Royal Hotel. Even the power of speech did not return to him until he found himself once more in the painfully reminiscent surroundings of Mr. Tombs's suite.

"Well," he demanded hoarsely, "what's the game?"

"The game," answered Simon Templar genially, "is the royal and ancient sport of hoisting engineers with their own petards, dear old wallaby. Take a look at where you

are, Gilbert. I'm here to let you out of the mess—at a price."

Mr. Tanfold's mouth opened.

"But that—that's blackmail!" he gasped.

"It doesn't bother me what you call it," Simon said calmly. "I want twenty-five thousand pounds to forget that you forged my signature. How about it?"

"You can't get it," Tanfold spat out. "If I published that photograph—"

"I should laugh myself sick," said the Saint. "I'm afraid there's something you'd better get wise to, brother. My father isn't a prominent Melbourne businessman and social reformer at all, except for your benefit; and you can paste enlargements of that picture all over Melbourne Town Hall for all I care. Make some inquiries outside the bar downstairs, gorgeous, and get up to date. Come along, now—which is to be? Twenty-five thousand smackers or the hoosegow? Take your choice."

Mr. Tanfold's face was turning green.

"I haven't got so much money in cash," he squawked.

"I'll give you a week to find it," said the Saint mercilessly, "and I don't really care much if you do go bankrupt in the process. I find you neither ornamental nor useful. But just in case you think forgery is the only charge you have to answer, you might like to listen to this."

He went through the communicating door to the bedroom, and was back in a moment. Suddenly, through the door, Mr. Tanfold heard the sounds of his own voice.

"Let's talk business. . . . I've got a photograph that was taken of you while you were at the studio. . . ."

With his face going paler and paler, Mr. Tanfold listened. He made no sound until the record was finished, and then he let out an abrupt squeal.

"But that isn't all of it!" he yelled. "It leaves off before the place where you gave me the check!"

"Of course it does," said the Saint shamelessly. "That would spike the forgery charge, wouldn't it? But as it stands, you've got two things to answer. First you tried to blackmail me; and then, when you found that wouldn't work, you forged my signature to a check for ten thousand quid. It was all very rash and naughty of you, Gilbert; and I'm sure the police would take a very serious view of the case—particularly after they'd investigated your business a bit more. Well, well, well, brother—we all make mistakes, and I'm afraid I shall have to send that dictaphone record along to Chief Inspector Teal, as well as charging you with forgery, if you haven't come through with the spondulix inside seven days."

Once again words rose to Mr.

Tanfold's lips; and once again, glimpsing the unholy gleam in the Saint's eye and remembering his previous experience in that room, they stuck in his throat. And once again Simon went to the door and opened it.

"This is the way out," said the Saint.

Mr. Gilbert Tanfold moved hazily towards the portal. As he passed through it, a pair of hands fell on his shoulders and steadied him with a light but masterful grip. Some premonition of his fate must have reached him, for his shrill cry disturbed the regal quietude of the Palace Royal Hotel even before the toe of a painfully powerful shoe impacted on his tender posterior had lifted him enthusiastically on his way.

EAST GERMANY'S POLICE BOSS

In June, 1953, unarmed East Berlin workers stoned Soviet tanks, demanding the resignation of the General Wilhelm Zaisser who once told his men: "An officer of my security department who is not capable of whipping a prisoner to death if need be and doing it with his own hands, without a second thought, is of no use to my department." Who was this man?

Zaisser, a former lieutenant in the Kaiser's army, had found life difficult in the French occupied Ruhr in the years immediately after the war. Some of his unemployed fellow officers were ending up in the Free Corps or in the unsuccessful Ludendorf Putch (including an ambitious young man named Hermann Goering), but Zaisser found the call of the German Communists, under Radek, for a common front against the French "invader," immensely more appealing. Soon leading sabotage raids, he was eventually arrested by the German government, escaping to Russia where he was sent to the Military Academy.

On Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Zaisser was parachuted into Germany to organize a network of Soviet industrial espionage, Zaisser himself joining the Gestapo, advancing to be Assistant Police Chief. Transferred to Spain when the Civil War began, he first commanded a brigade of the Loyalist Army, as General "Gomez," finally serving as Chief of Staff of the International Brigades.

Upon Hitler's invasion of Russia, the trusted Zaisser was put in charge of the camps for the imprisoned Nazi officers, his job to convert them to the need for a German-Russian alliance to defeat France, England, and the United States. Much of the present East German military power is the result of those conversations between the persuasive Zaisser and his guests.

Peace meant an East Germany under the heels of Zaisser's police—he was said to at one point employ 50,000 informers. He had to fill a monthly quota for slave labor deportations, while hundreds of thousands of Russians were, in turn, being "shifted" to strategic locations in Prussia. Succeeded by Ernest Wollweber, a former boss of Gerhardt Eisler, Zaisser's police continue in control—for the time being. . . .

lady's day at the morgue

by . . . Craig Rice

They whispered that nobody's husband was safe so long as that Henrietta Robinson remained in scandalized Troy!

IN ABOUT as many years as you can count on the fingers of one hand it will be a full century since Henrietta Robinson went on trial for murder in Troy, New York, but there are aspects of this case that are still a mystery today. Oh yes, Henrietta was guilty, all right. There was no mystery about that. The victims? Their identity was never in doubt, not for a single minute. And yet, there *is* a mystery, not about "whodunit," or where, or when, or how, but about the murderess herself. For today, a hundred years later, people are still asking— "Who *was* Henrietta Robinson?"

That is what makes the case of Henrietta Robinson a whodunit, even though the killer has long ago served out the sentence, not only of the Law but of life itself, and gone to her grave with the secret of her true identity still locked in her heart.

And not only is Henrietta's identity a mystery, but so also is the reason why she committed the murders. For Henrietta's reason was—a woman's reason.

While Craig Rice will always be remembered for her John J. Malone novels, including KNOCKED FOR A LOOP *(S & S, $2.95), published recently, she also wrote a good deal of true crime, convinced that life was stranger than fiction, including this story of a murder that shocked early Victorian Troy.*

From: FORTY-FIVE MURDERERS, 1952, Simon and Schuster, Inc.
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Henrietta Robinson's life story is full of men. Men loved her, men helped her, men deserted her. And in her hour of trial men hunted her down, men arrested her, men prosecuted her, men defended her, men convicted, sentenced and jailed her. And now, after a hundred years, men are still asking: Who was Henrietta Robinson? and Why did she do it?

So perhaps the men won't mind it if one of us girls takes a hand in the matter, and tries to solve the mystery.

To begin with, the murder weapon was neither a sharp instrument nor a blunt instrument, to use the polite, almost surgical language of legal gobbel-gabbel. Nor was it a gun. It, was something much daintier, more feminine. Poison.

Now, it isn't that we girls *couldn't* murder the way men do. We've had our hatchet-women and our axe-slayers, and even a few stranglers, too. It's just that, as a rule, we prefer our own gentler, more subtle ways of committing homicide. Ask any of the boys in the Homicide Department and they'll tell you. Whether by the hand of a lady or a gentleman, the victim is just as dead either way.

In murder, as in any other art, it's results that count.

And, to the Troy police who viewed the victims' remains in the morgue on that mid-May day in 1853, the results were only too obvious. Clearly it was—Lady's Day at the Morgue.

Everybody in Troy knew Henrietta Robinson, that is, everybody who was anybody. For Henrietta was Social. Local Society had taken Henrietta to its bosom, although there were many, especially among the wives, who wished it might have chosen a locality not so close to the heart. No woman's husband was safe, they whispered, when Henrietta Robinson was around.

Henrietta Robinson was beautiful. Even her most venomous wifely critics conceded that. Black hair and flashing eyes, with a sultry, gypsy-like air of mystery about her—many a Troy matron's heart must have missed a beat when she heard her husband humming a snatch of that popular ballad of the time—

"Black, black, black is the color
Of my true love's hair,
Her lips are something
wondrous fair . . ."

For it was rumored that Henrietta's lovers were many, and counted among their number some of the biggest Names in town.

One of these Names was Gregory Pentland.

Mr. Pentland was one of the most prosperous and respected merchants in Troy. A Victorian

gentleman, and, in the style of the '50's, a Man of Distinction. A hard man in business, but shy as a schoolboy in matters of the heart—or so the story goes.

Gregory Pentland lost his heart to Henrietta Robinson not in Troy but in New York City, while on a business trip. According to gossip it was at the swanky Irving Hotel, where he saw the beauty dining, in solitary grandeur, at a nearby table. It was love at first sight, but, so shy was the gentleman, that he could not bring himself to approach the exotic-looking siren, but only worshipped her from afar.

When she left New York, Pentland followed her to Quebec, and when she left Quebec he booked passage on the same boat and cruised over Lake Champlain with her. With her, and yet not with her. For, while he basked in the sunshine of her presence—or would "moonshine" be more fitting for a brunette?—he stayed strictly in the shadows, still fearful of declaring his love.

It was in a Troy hotel, according to the story, that our lovesick but shy Lothario finally found his tongue, and the result was electrical. Or should I say gaseous, for in those days they were still cooking with gas.

Anyway, whether by electricity or gas, from that moment on Gregory Pentland's goose was cooked. Also, it was hanging high. For the beauteous Henrietta Robinson was his—to share with, goodness knows, how many others. But that was something Mr. Pentland didn't know, or didn't care to know, till later.

In the meantime Pentland played the role of Victorian sugar-daddy, which, from all accounts, is a role of which not a single line has been changed to this day. He bought Henrietta a little white cottage on River Street, by the banks of the Hudson, saw her as often as he could break away unnoticed—he hoped—from his wife and family, and paid the bills for the house, French maid and gardener.

And so it would have gone on and on, in usual Victorian fashion, till the family lawyer opened the will of the late lamented and revealed the usual "provisions" for a female unnamed and known only to the executor. But it was not to be this way, for Henrietta was not the usual Victorian "other woman." One day, in quite unVictorian and unladylike fashion, she up and killed two people.

This tragic turn of events may have surprised the love-lorn Mr. Pentland, but it came as no surprise to the nice people of Troy. What else was one to expect from a lady who had often been seen walking by the river bank at night, attired in men's clothing, flourishing two pistols and threatening to shoot anybody who ventured near her house uninvited!

What else?—from a woman who only a week before had gotten drunk and accused her dancing partner of insulting her, and created such a scene that her hosts had to ask her to leave.

Now, it was her host of that Saturday evening, Timothy Lanagan, who lay dead at the morgue. He, and his servant girl, Katherine Lubee.

Testimony taken at the inquest left little doubt as to the guilt of Henrietta Robinson, but so far as motive for the murders was concerned it left police with a pretty puzzle on their hands.

According to one account, Henrietta seemed to bear no grudge against the Lanagans for putting her out of the place the week before. Timothy Lanagan and his wife ran a grocery store not far from Henrietta's cottage, and sold a little liquor on the side. About a week after the dancing episode Henrietta dropped in at the store early in the morning and bought a quart of beer. In the afternoon her gardener appeared and said Miss Robinson wanted the Lanagans to lend her two dollars. That didn't seem to make sense to Mr. Lanagan. He knew that Henrietta could always get plenty of money when she needed it. Besides, she had a very annoying way of forgetting about money she borrowed when she was drinking heavily. A moment later Henrietta herself entered the store and Lanagan knew that his surmise was correct. She was certainly under the "influence," but when he refused to lend her the two dollars she went away quietly, only to return an hour later with a story that Lanagan had heard many times before:

"My husband! He's been in a railroad accident! What shall I do?"

A minute later she had forgotten all about the imaginary railway crash and was starting a violent argument with some of the men in the store. Four times that day Henrietta was in and out of the store with one story or another. The fourth time she said she was hungry, so Mrs. Lanagan, like a good soul, went back to the kitchen and fixed her some food. Then she asked for beer. "We'll drink a toast," she said.

As told by Mrs. Lanagan at the inquest, the scene that followed could have been taken straight out of the pages of the fabulous Borgias. Henrietta asked for some sugar, saying she was going to mix something very special in the way of a drink, and then and there, before their very eyes, she prepared the death potion!

Mrs. Lanagan noticed a white scum on top and started to skim it off with her spoon, but Henrietta stopped her.

"Don't," she cried. "That's the best part of it."

Mrs. Lanagan took a sip and then she heard her husband call-

ing from the kitchen. She set the glass down, and when Mr. Lanagan came in Henrietta offered him the glass his wife had started. Katherine Lubee entered and Henrietta offered her a drink, too.

"A toast!" Henrietta shouted, and broke into a laugh, a drunken, heart-broken laugh. She was still laughing when she left, the hysterical, half-sobbing laughter of an unhappy woman.

Before another sun rose Timothy Lanagan and Katherine Lubee had died in agony.

William Ostrom, who owned a drug store in the neighborhood, told of selling Henrietta the poison. There was no restriction on the sale of arsenic in Troy. Everybody bought it, for use against the rats that infested the river front.

The black-haired Borgia was picked up by a Constable that very day, not for murder, of which the officer knew nothing, but for being drunk and disorderly and carrying a gun.

While Henrietta was sobering up in her cell, police searched the little white cottage by the river. Hidden away in the house they found enough arsenic to kill all the river rats on the Hudson, and half the population of Troy to boot. Then the Coroner brought in the report of the autopsy. Arsenic poisoning. To the charge of disorderly conduct and gun-toting, police now added the charge of murder against Henrietta Robinson.

The news spread like wildfire, bursting into flaming front page headlines in every newspaper in the U. S. and Canada. In Canada the story took on special interest from the fact that, as rumor had it, Henrietta Robinson was really the daughter of Robert Wood, a Quebec millionaire. Henrietta, the gossips were saying, was one of four daughters of the Wood family who had attended the Female Seminary in Troy. Which one of the four she was no one pretended to know exactly, but a few people who claimed to be "in the know" insisted she was Charlotte Wood, who later married Lieutenant William Elliott of the British Army. While she was a student at the Seminary, they said, Charlotte had a love affair with a young Troy socialite, who had since married someone else and moved out West.

The rumors became so loud and clamorous that the Wood family of Quebec placed an anonymous advertisement in one of the Troy papers denying that Henrietta was one of their four daughters, and adding that "all four girls were pupils of the Troy Female Seminary, but every one of them is now married, and living abroad. Their brother, Mr. William F. Wood," the advertisement went on to say, "is now in Troy, having come to sift this injurious report."

William Wood visited the prison and was closeted with Henrietta for more than an hour. When he emerged from the cell he declared emphatically that Henrietta Robinson was not Charlotte Wood, or any other daughter of the Wood family.

In the months that followed not another man, of all the men Henrietta had known, came near that prison cell. Not even the devoted and love-crazed Gregory Pentland. People wondered where she would find the money for her legal defense, now that everybody had abandoned her. But, to everyone's surprise, when the case came up for trial in October, the lawyer who stepped up to the bar and announced himself as Defense Counsel was Horatio Q. Bellows, one of the most prominent members of the Troy bar, whose services never commanded a fee of less than four figures.

The trial of Henrietta Robinson was one of the strangest in the history of the American courts, for two reasons. One—because counsel for the defense offered no evidence to disprove the prosecution's charge that the accused committed the murders. Instead, Bellows put witnesses on the stand to testify that his client was hopelessly insane. And, Two—because, throughout the trial Henrietta persisted in wearing a black veil over her face, and refusing to lift it, even on the entreaties of her own lawyer. The newspapers nicknamed her "The Veiled Murderess."

Perhaps Bellows hoped that by omitting mention of any motive whatever for the crime the jury would have to conclude that the killings were utterly senseless, and thus bolster up his claim that Henrietta was insane. On the other hand, the State was equally at a loss to account for the crime, so that the motive remained a mystery to the very end. And so did the identity of the accused.

When, a week later, the jury brought in a verdict of guilty, Henrietta, who had been ominously quiet during the whole trial, went screaming wild with rage and had to be dragged away from the courtroom by main force. The judge postponed the death sentence pending a plea by Bellows for review by the higher courts.

The trial was over, but people were still asking, Who is the Veiled Murderess? As far as the police were concerned their job was finished. In the policeman's garden of roses a murderer by any other name smells just as sweet. As Henrietta Robinson she had committed the murders, so, as Henrietta Robinson they locked her up in jail. After all, what's in a name—especially in a place where a person is just a number.

To Horatio Q. Bellows, however, the trial had just begun.

Henrietta had been silent about her true identity all through the trial. Now she was in her cell sobbing for her "dear brother William" to come and help her. Was she really one of the Wood sisters? Bellows decided to find out, and it is largely due to his efforts that we have any record at all on which to hazard a guess as to the identity of the murderess and her motives for committing the crime.

Bellows' curiosity was aroused when a Troy woman who had gone to school with Charlotte Wood at the Seminary told the Sheriff's wife that Charlotte's little finger on her right hand was crooked as the result of a riding accident. That checked with the facts. It made him wonder if Henrietta wasn't Charlotte Wood, after all. Then something else happened. Serena Moody, who lived in Troy but was known to have once been a maid in the employ of the Wood family in Quebec, suddenly picked up all her belongings and moved to Philadelphia. Serena had visited the veiled Borgia in jail and the two had greeted each other with every sign of joyous recognition. Why had she, like everybody else, abandoned Henrietta?

He paid a visit to Serena Moody in Philadelphia and came away with the impression that Serena recognized Henrietta as Charlotte all right, but somebody had brought pressure to bear on her—and money too, perhaps—to keep her from talking. She did, however, furnish him with the name and address of a butler who had served the Wood family for years. His name was Uriah Duncan and he lived in Peekskill.

Uriah Duncan was shocked when Bellows told him he suspected the "Veiled Murderess" of being Charlotte Wood, and it was not till the lawyer convinced him that what he could reveal about Charlotte's past might save her from the gallows that the old butler consented to talk. Duncan then told the story of Charlotte's love for the son of a wealthy Troy family when she was still a sixteen-year-old student at the Seminary. Robert Wood, Charlotte's father, broke up that romance and, at nineteen, Charlotte married Lieutenant Elliott and went with him to live in England. Before long Elliott's letters to his father-in-law, Mr. Wood, began to tell of Charlotte's fits of temper, moody silences, and addiction to drink. They had two children, the butler told Bellows, and she seemed to be devoted to them, but suddenly she deserted Elliott, left the children to be cared for in London, and departed with her French maid for New York. When her father confronted her with the demand that she forget that first love of hers and return to her husband, Charlotte refused—and the stern parent, in the true Victorian manner,

ordered her never to darken his door again.

Bellows found the French maid, Mimi Fleurot, living in Hartford, Conn. Mimi told him about a man who was "in love with Madame," a man she had first seen at the Irving Hotel in New York and who later bought her the little white cottage by the river. Bellows had heard the gossip and knew this man was Gregory Pentland. He was convinced now that the "Veiled Murderess" was Charlotte Wood, but the fact remained that, sane or insane, she had killed two innocent people. Why had she done that? He was at a loss for any answer except insanity.

That answer was enough to enable Bellows to save his client from the gallows, but it was not enough to save her from life imprisonment. After all, nobody had been willing to come forward and positively identify Henrietta Robinson as Charlotte Wood. Officially she was still Henrietta Robinson and, as Henrietta Robinson she went to a cell at Sing Sing prison—still wearing the black veil.

Years later, a broken woman with nothing left to live for, she was released from jail and vanished behind the permanent veil of obscurity and old age. Her release, it was rumored, was due to the behind-the-scenes pressure of Gregory Pentland, who, as he felt death approaching, was impelled to make some atonement for having deserted the woman he loved in her hour of trial.

What was the truth behind the veil of silences and evasions that becloud the story of Henrietta Robinson and her tragic fate?

The evidence is all circumstantial, of course, but it offers certain clues. For example, Henrietta is visited in jail by William Wood; she has been abandoned by everybody and is known to be penniless. Yet, a few days after William Wood's visit, she calls her old gardener to the cell and gives him a sealed envelope to deliver to Horatio Q. Bellows. This envelope contained $5,000 in cash and a request for a black veil, together with a note asking Bellows to act as her attorney and accept the money as a retainer. Bellows admitted all this later.

What is the meaning of it? I think the meaning is clear. William Wood, as the Wood family's emissary, offered Henrietta the money for her legal defense if she would, so to speak, take the veil of secrecy so far as her identity was concerned.

If we assume, then, that Henrietta was really Charlotte Wood, it becomes easier to understand the motive for the murders. Cut off from her family because she could not bring herself to accept life with a man she did not love, and unable to forget the youth she had never ceased to love, Charlotte brooded on her wrongs

till she was consumed by a burning lust for revenge—revenge against her family for having robbed her of her first love and ruined her life.

When a man lusts for revenge, whether against his family or anybody else, he is apt to take a direct line of action, and vent his wrath on those who have wronged him. A woman's way is more indirect; sometimes innocent people get hurt.

Henrietta—let's call her Charlotte now—had nothing against Timothy Lanagan or his servant girl Katherine Lubee. The kindly Irishman and his wife had been like a father and mother to the unhappy girl. And that was the very thing that cost Lanagan his life and nearly cost Mrs. Lanagan her life too. For it was against parenthood that Charlotte was bent on avenging herself. As long as Lanagan granted her wishes, Charlotte was able to restrain her mad impulse for revenge, but the minute he crossed her—by refusing to lend her the two dollars—she lost all self-control and killed him. That she did it with poison instead of shooting him with the gun she was always toting is another evidence of Charlotte's sense of feminine indirection. Poison kills in the absence of the killer. It kills by indirection. That is why poison is so often the woman's weapon.

I have no wish to make excuses for Charlotte Wood. But I cannot help feeling that she was at least as much sinned against as sinning. Once she had her revenge, which was primarily aimed at bringing shame on the family that she felt had wronged her, she suffered a change of heart and took the veil of secrecy to protect their good name. It was only later, when, after failing to strike one blow in her own defense, her family and everybody else deserted her, that Charlotte tried to save herself from the gallows by claiming identity with the Wood family. Even then she did it half-heartedly, and dropped the effort almost immediately, leaving it to her lawyer to run down the story on his own volition. What was it that stopped her this second time?

I think it was a memory of the two children she had left behind her in London. She didn't want to bring disgrace on them. So she drew the black veil back over her face and let the gray walls of Sing Sing shut her in from a world that had brought her nothing but sorrow. And when she finally left the prison walls behind her and was free to make the truth known to the world, she continued to keep her lips sealed and shrunk away into the shadows forever.

(NOTE: *The names of Uriah Duncan, Serena Moody, Gregory Pentland, and Mimi Fleurot are fictitious.*)

happy travellers

by . . . Edgar Wallace

Leon did not deny that Isola Koskina was very lovely, and therefore the more dangerous to the fool who'd love her.

OF THE three men who had their headquarters in Curzon Street, George Manfred was by far the best-looking. His were the features and poise of an aristocrat. In a crowd he stood out by himself, not alone because of his height, but because of the imponderable something which distinguishes breeding.

"George looks like a racehorse in a herd of Shetland ponies!" said the enthusiastic Leon Gonsalez on one occasion. Which was very nearly true.

Yet it was Leon who attracted the average woman, and even women above the average. It was fatal to send him to deal with a case in which women were concerned, not because he himself was given to philandering, but because it was as certain as anything could be that he would come back leaving at least one sighing maiden to bombard him with letters ten pages long.

Which really made him rather unhappy.

"I'm old enough to be most of their fathers," he wailed on one occasion, "and as I live I said no more than 'Good morning' to the

Edgar Wallace, who won a unique reputation between 1919 and his death in the early thirties for his mystery novels, returns with another story of the Three Just Men who, sickened by the Law's delays and apparent blindness, had dedicated themselves to righting wrongs the Law could not touch.

From: THE LAW OF THE THREE JUST MEN.
Copyright, 1931, by Edgar Wallace.

wench. Had I held her hand or chanted a canto or two into her pink ear, I would stand condemned. But, George, I swear—"

But George was helpless with laughter.

Yet Leon could act the perfect lover. Once in Cordova he paid court to a certain señorita—three knife scars on his right breast testify to the success of his wooing. As to the two men who attacked him, they are dead, for by his courting he lured into the open the man for whom the police of Spain and France were searching.

And he was especially effusive one spring morning to a slim and beautiful dark-eyed lady whom he met in Rotten Row. He was on foot, leaning against the rails and watching the riders, when he saw her walking slowly past and unattended. A graceful woman of thirty with a faultless skin and gray eyes that were almost black.

It was by no accident that they met, for Leon had been studying her movements for weeks.

"This is an answer to prayer, beautiful lady," he said, and his extravagance was the more facile since he spoke in Italian.

She laughed softly, gave him one swift, quizzical glance from under the long lashes, and signalled him to replace the hat that was now in his hand.

"Good morning, Signor Carrelli," she smiled, and gave him a small gloved hand. She was simply but expensively dressed. The only jewels she wore were the string of pearls about her white throat.

"I see you everywhere," she said. "You were dining at the Carlton on Monday night, and before that I saw you in a box at a theatre, and yesterday afternoon I met you!"

Leon showed his white teeth in a delighted smile.

"That is true, illustrious lady," he said, "but you make no reference to my searching London to find somebody who would introduce me. Nor do you pity my despair as I followed you, feasting my eyes upon your beauty, or my sleepless nights . . ."

All this he said with the fervour of a love-sick youth, and she listened without giving evidence of disapproval.

"You shall walk with me," she said, in the manner of a queen conveying an immense privilege.

They strolled away from the crowd towards the open spaces of the park, and they talked of Rome and the hunting season, of runs on Campagna and the parties of Princess Leipnitz-Savalo. (Leon read the society columns of the Roman press with great assiduity and remembered all that he read.)

They came at last to a place of trees and comfortable garden chairs. Leon paid the watchful attendant, and, after he had strolled away:

"How beautiful it is to sit alone with divinity!" he began ecstati-

cally. "For I tell you this, signorina—"

"Tell me something else, Mr. Leon Gonsalez," said the lady, and this time she spoke in English and her voice had the qualities of steel and ice. "Why are you shadowing me?"

If she expected to confound him it was because she did not know her Leon.

"Because you are an extremely dangerous lady, Madame Koskina," he said coolly, "and all the more dangerous because the Lord has given you kissable lips and a cuddleable body. How many impressionable young attachés of embassies have discovered these charms in you!"

She laughed at this and was seemingly well pleased.

"You have been reading the admirable romances of William le Queux," she said. "No, my dear Mr. Gonsalez, I am out of politics—they bore me. Poor Ivan is in Russia struggling with the work of the Economic Commission and living in dread of the *Cheka* because of his well-known Liberal views, and I am in London, which is delightfully capitalistic and comfy! Believe me, Leningrad is no place for a lady of refinement!"

Isola Koskina had been Isola Caprevetti before she married a dashing young Russian attaché. She had been a revolutionary from birth; it needed only the coming of Red rule to Russia to develop in her a zeal for revolution that amounted to fanaticism.

Leon smiled.

"There are worse places for a lady of refinement even than Leningrad. I should be grieved indeed, my dear Isola, to see you making coarse shirts in Aylesbury convict establishment."

She looked at him steadily, insolently.

"That is a threat, and threats bore me. The excellent Duce threatened me with . . . all sorts of dreadful things if I ever showed myself on the wrong side of Simplon Pass. And really I am the most inoffensive person in the world, Monsieur Gonsalez. You are, of course, employed by the government—how eminently respectable! Which government?"

Leon grinned, but was serious again in a second.

"The Italian frontiers are practically closed since the last attempt on the Dictator," he said. "You and your friends are causing everybody an immense amount of trouble. Naturally the government are concerned. They do not wish to wake up one morning and find that they are implicated—and that some successful assassin made a jump from—England, shall we say?"

The lady shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"How very dramatic! And therefore poor Isola Koskina must be watched by detectives and reformed murderers—I suppose you

and your precious comrades *are* reformed?"

The smile on the thin face of Leon Gonsalez widened.

"If we were not, signorina, what would happen? Should I be sitting here talking pretty-pretty talk with you? Would you not be picked out of the Thames at Limehouse all cold and clammy some morning, and lie on a slab till a coroner's jury returned a verdict of 'Found drowned'?"

He saw the color leave her face: fear came to her eyes.

"You had better threaten Ivan —" she began.

"I will wire to him: he is not in Leningrad but living in Berlin under the name of Petersohn—Martin Lutherstrasse 904. How easy it would be if we were not reformed! A dead man in a gutter and a policeman searching his pockets for a card of identity—"

She rose hurriedly; her very lips were bloodless.

"You do not amuse me," she said, and, turning from him, walked quickly away.

Leon made no attempt to follow her. It was two days after this encounter that the letter came. Many people wrote to the Just Men, a few abusively, quite a number fatuously. But now and again there could be extracted from the morning correspondence quite a pretty little problem. And the dingy letter with its finger-marks and creases was quite worth the 3d. that the postman charged them—for it came unstamped. The address was:

Four Just Men,
Curzon Street,
May Fair,
West End, London.

The writing was that of an illiterate, and the letter went:

Dear Sir,

You are surposed to go in for misteries well hear is a mistery. I was a boiler makers mate in Hollingses but now out of work and one sunday I was photoed by a foren lady she come in front of me with a camra and took me. There was a lot of chaps in the park but she only took me. Then she ast me my name and address and ast me if I knew a clergyman. And when I said yes she wrote down the name of the Rev. J. Crewe, and then she said shed send me a pictur dear sir she didn't send me a pictur but ast me to joyne the Happy Travlers to go to Swizzleland Rome, etc. and nothing to pay all expences payed also loss of time (Ten £) and soots of close everything done in stile. Well dear sir I got ready and she did everything close ten £ &c. also she got tickets &c. But now the lady says I got to go to Devonshire not that I mind. Now dear sir thats a mistery because I just met a gentleman from Leeds and has had his photo took and joyned the Happy Travlers and hes going to Cornwall and this lady who

took the picture of him ast him if he knew a clergyman and wrote it down. Now what is the mistery is it something to do with religion?

Yours sincerely,
T. BARGER.

George Manfred read the ill-spelt scrawl and threw the letter across the breakfast table to Leon Gonsalez.

"Read me that riddle, Leon," he said.

Leon read and frowned.

"'Happy Travellers,' eh? That's queer."

The letter went to Raymond, who studied it with an expressionless face.

"Eh, Raymond?" Leon asked, his eyes alight.

"I think so," said Raymond, nodding slowly.

"Will you let me into your 'mistery'?" asked Manfred.

Leon chuckled.

"No mystery at all, my dear George. I will see this T. Barger, whose name is surely 'Thomas' and will learn certain particulars, as, for example, the color of his eyes and the testimonial he has received from Sir Austen Chamberlain."

"Mistery on mistery," murmured George Manfred as he sipped his coffee—though in truth the matter was no longer a mystery to him. The reference to Sir Austen Chamberlain was very illuminating.

"As to the lady—" said Leon, and shook his head.

His big Bentley created a mild sensation in the street where T. Barger lived. It was situated near the East India Dock, and T. Barger (whose front name was surprisingly Theophilus) proved to be a tall, dark man of thirty with a small black moustache and rather heavy black eyebrows. He was obviously wearing his new "soot" and had expended at least a portion of his "ten £" on alcoholic refreshment, for he was in a loud and confident mood.

"I'm leavin' tomorrow," he said thickly, "for Torquay—everything paid. Travellin' like a swell . . . first class. You one of them Justers?"

Leon induced him to go into the house.

"It's a myst-ry to me," said Mr. Barger, "why she done it. Happy Trav'ler—that's what I am. She might have took me abroad—I'd like to have seen them mountains, but she says if I don't speak the Swiss language I'd be out of it. Anyway, what's the matter with Torquay?"

"The other man is going to Cornwall?"

Mr. Barger nodded solemnly.

"An' his mate's goin' to Somerset—funny meetin' him at all. . . ."

He explained the coincidence, which had to do with a public house where Mr. Barger had called for a drink.

"What was his name?"

"Rigson—Harry Rigson. I told him his, he told me mine. The other man? Harry's pal? I call him Harry—we're like pals—now let me think, mister. . . ."

Leon let him think.

"Funny name . . . Coke . . . no, Soke . . . Lokely! That's it—Joe Lokely."

Leon asked a few more questions which were seemingly irrelevant but were not.

"Of course I had to be passed by the committee," said the communicative Theophilus. "Accordin' to Harry, this lady photoed a friend of his but he didn't pass."

"I see," said Leon. "What time do you leave for Devonshire?"

"Tomorrow mornin' — seven o'clock. Bit early, ain't it. But this lady says that Happy Travellers must be early risers. Harry's goin' by the same train but in another coach. . . ."

Leon went back to Curzon Street well satisfied. The question he had to decide was: was Isola an early riser too?

"I hardly think so," said Raymond Poiccart. "She would not take the risk—especially if she knows that she is watched."

That night Scotland Yard was a very hive of industry, and Leon Gonsalez did without sleep. Fortunately Isola had been under police observation, and the Yard knew every district in England she had visited for the past month. By midnight two thousand ministers of religion had been awakened from their sleep by the local police and asked to furnish certain particulars.

Isola went to a dinner and dance that night and her partner was a very nice young man, tall and dark of face. She chose the L'Orient, which is the most exclusive and plutocratic of night clubs. Men and women turned to admire or criticize her beauty as she entered, a radiant figure in scarlet. The dull gold turban she wore set off the glories of her lovely face, and there was sinuous grace in every movement.

They had reached the dessert when suddenly she laid two fingers on the tablecloth.

"Who is it?" asked her companion carelessly as he saw the danger signal.

"The man I told you about—he is at the table immediately opposite."

Presently the dark young man looked.

"So that is the famous Gonsalez! A wisp of a man that I could break—"

"A wisp of a man who has broken giants, Emilo," she interrupted. "Have you heard of Saccoriva—was he not a giant? That man killed him—shot him down in his own headquarters when there was a guard of revolutionary brethren within call—and escaped!"

"He is anti-revolutionary?" Emilo was impressed.

She shook her head.

"Comrade Saccoriva was very foolish—with women. It was over some girl he had taken—and left. He is looking this way; I will call him over."

Leon rose lazily at the signal and came across the crowded dance floor.

"Signorita, you will never forgive me!" he said in despair. "Here am I watching you again! And yet I only came here because I was bored."

"Bore me also," she said with her sweetest smile, and then, remembering her companion: "This is Herr Halz from Leipzig."

Leon's eyes twinkled.

"Your friends change their nationalities as often as they change their names," he said. "I remember Herr Halz of Leipzig when he was Emilo Cassini of Turin!"

Emilo shifted uncomfortably, but Isola was amused.

"This man is omniscient! Dance with me, Señor Gonsalez, and promise that you will not murder me!"

They went twice round the ballroom before Leon spoke.

"If I had your face and figure and youth, I should have a good time and not bother with politics," he said.

"And if I had your wisdom and cunning I should remove tyrants from their high positions," she retorted, her voice quivering.

That was all that was said. Going out into the vestibule, Leon discovered the girl and her escort waiting. It was raining heavily and Isola's car could not be found.

"May I drop you, gracious lady?" Leon's smile was most entrancing. "I have a poor car but it is at your disposition."

Isola hesitated.

"Thank you," she said.

Leon, ever the acme of politeness, insisted on taking one of the seats that put his back to the driver. It was not his own car. Usually he was very nervous about other drivers, but tonight he did not mind.

They crossed Trafalgar Square.

"The man is taking the wrong turning," said Isola with quick vehemence.

"This is the right road to Scotland Yard," said Leon. "We call this the Way of the Happy Traveller—keep your hand away from your pocket, Emilo. I have killed men on less provocation, and I have been covering you ever since we left the club!"

In the early hours of the morning telegrams were despatched to the police headquarters at Folkestone and Dover:

"Arrest and detain Theophilus Barger, Joseph Lokely, Henry Rigson" (here followed five other names) "travelling to the Conti-

nent by boat either today or tomorrow."

There was no need to give instructions about Isola. For a perfect lady, her behavior was indefensible.

"She blotted her copybook," said Leon sadly. "I've never seen a Happy Traveller less happy when we got her to Scotland Yard."

Considering the matter at the morning conference which was part of the daily routine in Curzon Street, Manfred was inclined to regard the plot as almost elementary.

"If you speak disparagingly of my genius and power of deduction I shall burst into tears," said Leon. "Raymond thinks I was clever—I will not have the verdict challenged. George, you're getting old and grouchy."

"The detection was clever," Manfred hastened to placate his smiling friend.

"And the scheme was clever," insisted Leon, "and terribly like Isola. One of these days she'll do something awfully original and be shot by the *Cheka*. Obviously, what she set out to do was to collect seven men who bore some resemblance to the members of her murder gang. When she had found them, she made them get passports—that of course is why she asked if they knew a clergyman, for a padre's signature on the photograph and application form is as good as a lawyer's. Seven poor innocent men with passports which she handed over to her friends whilst the happy travellers were sent into out-of-the-way places. She was heading the gang into Italy—all the passports were visaed for that country."

"Tell me," said Manfred, "did they arrest the spurious T. Barger at Dover?"

Leon shook his head.

"The man who was to have travelled with T. Barger's passport was one Emilo Cassini—I spotted the likeness immediately. Isola was very abusive—but I quieted her by suggesting that her husband might like to know something about her friendship with Emilo. . . . I have been watching Isola for a long time and I have seen things."

the thirteenth card

by...E. Phillips Oppenheim

Cartwright had disappeared just as they'd been about to start. What had happened to him? Had he been killed?

A LITTLE company of men, amongst whom was Jasper Slane, trooped out from the dining-room of the Lavender Club, and approached the broad staircase which led to the bridge rooms. The hall porter, who had been speaking on the telephone, hurried over to them.

"Sir Jasper," he announced—"you are wanted on the telephone, sir."

Slane paused dubiously. Telephone calls at that hour of the evening were inopportune.

"Do you know who it is?" he asked.

"He didn't mention his name, sir," the man replied, "but I fancy that it was Lord Minchingham's voice. He said that it was an urgent matter."

"Put me in the table, and I'll play the next rubber," Slane begged his companions, with a little sigh of regret. "I don't know what the devil Minchingham wants with me at this time of the night."

He entered the telephone box and picked up the receiver.

"That you, Minchingham?" he inquired.

The name of E. Phillips Oppenheim was synonymous, for years, with the mystery novel, to the millions, here and abroad, who enjoyed his many novels, set generally against an upper-class British or South of France background, often topical in content and as often Ruritanian in flavor.

From: SLANE'S LONG SHOTS.
Copyright, 1929, 1930, by E. Phillips Oppenheim.

"Wizard!" was the brief response. "I say, Slane, are you doing anything very particular?"

"Well, I was just going to play bridge."

"So were we, but fate seems to have intervened. What I want to know is whether you can come round here, number 6a, Cunningham Mansions, you know."

"Do you mean at once or later on?" Slane queried with certain lack of enthusiasm in his tone.

"I mean this minute. Come in the quickest taxi you can find. Something has happened which we don't quite understand. I think you could help us. Awfully sorry and all that, but—"

"I will come," Slane promised.

He hung up the receiver, sent a regretful message upstairs, put on his hat and coat, found a taxi, and drove to Cunningham Mansions. The building in which the flat was situated was a comparatively small one. The ground floor was taken up by shops on each side, the first floor by offices, the second floor by a residential flat, and the third by Lord Minchingham's bijou but famous bachelor suite. There was a slight air of disturbance, Slane noticed, in the entrance hall. The commissionaire was looking annoyed and the lift man distrait. Slane, however, asked no questions, stepped into the lift, ascended to the third floor, was relieved of his coat and hat by Minchingham's perfect butler, and ushered at once into the library. Minchingham, pale, with a high forehead, languid eyes, slim, debonair, but intensely lethargic, not from mannerism but from real disposition, rose to meet him. He had been seated at a card table, at which were two other men The fourth place was vacant.

"Very good of you to come, Jasper," Minchingham said as he shook hands. "You know these fellows, I think."

Slane nodded, and exchanged greetings with the other two men. One was Goring Brett, who held a permanent post in the Foreign Office; the other was Sir Martin Phipps, a member of Parliament, chairman of many companies, and a well-known figure in the world of finance. Even from the moment of his entrance there seemed to Slane to be something curious about that fourth and empty place.

"What are you doing? Playing cut-throat?" he asked.

"We are half afraid there is someone else who is doing that," Minchingham replied in his high-pitched, bored tone. "We sat down to play a rubber of bridge three-quarters of an hour ago—we three and Cartwright. You know Ronny Cartwright, of course?"

"Yes, I know Ronny," Slane admitted.

"The cards had just been dealt, when Thomson, my butler, came in to say that someone wanted to speak to Cartwright on the

telephone. He apologized, and hurried away, carrying his cards and sorting them as he left the room. The telephone is in the little hall smoking-room outside, as I dare say you know. I am telling you all this rather carefully because we have so little to go on, and any trifle might give you an idea."

"Quite right."

"Well, we waited a minute or two," Minchingham continued, his drawl becoming more pronounced. "We waited five minutes. We waited nearly ten. Then these fellows began to get the fidgets, and I went out. Cartwright's cards were on the small table by the side of the telephone instrument. The front door was open, but he himself had vanished. I rang for Thomson. Thomson knew nothing. I looked round the flat—no sign of Cartwright. I went downstairs to the commissionaire. He had been in his little office for the last three-quarters of an hour, and was sure that not a soul had entered or left the building. The long and short of it is, Slane—it's a damned silly thing to say—but Ronny Cartwright has disappeared."

"Well, he can't have got very far," Slane observed with a smile.

"That should make the task simpler," Minchingham rejoined, "but all we ask is, find him for us. You know the geography of the place. The ground floor is let out in shops, which have been closed up for at least three hours. The floor above consists of offices, and they have been empty since seven o'clock. The floor above them, and immediately under this flat, is occupied by Princess Madziwill, a very wealthy Russian-Polish lady who keeps us in touch with the *haut monde,* inasmuch as even Buckingham Palace calls to see her. We two are the only tenants."

"Does Cartwright know the Princess?" Slane inquired.

"I am quite sure he doesn't, because only last time he was here he asked, curiously enough, who occupied the other flat. Rather got his eye on it for himself, I think, if there had been any chance of the lease falling in. . . . Now, what about it, my friend Jasper? There's the ground floor, with its shops, and the first floor with locked doors, empty; my flat, which you can turn inside-out if you like; the Princess Madziwill's who, as I told you, is thoroughly well known, leads a very quiet life, and never goes out in the evening. I ask you, where is Ronny Cartwright?"

"We'll get to work in a moment," replied Jasper Slane, who was becoming more and more intrigued. "I hope you won't mind if I try a very short reconstruction."

He subsided into Cartwright's vacant place, helped himself to a cigarette, rose as though to obey

a summons from Thomson, or from someone entering the room, and strolled out to the little hall where the telephone was placed. Upon the table by its side were the playing cards, which presumably Cartwright had laid down. He looked them over carefully. They were divided into suits, but there was something unfamiliar about them when spread out in his hand. He realized in a moment what it was. There were only twelve cards. He looked under the table, and upon the carpet —no sign of any other. He laid them down once more, and took the receiver from the telephone.

"Hullo!" he called out.

There was no reply. He spoke apparently into a well of silence. He tried again and again, pressed the hook down time after time. There was still no reply. He summoned Thomson.

"Thomson, is this the telephone that rang when you fetched Mr. Cartwright?" he inquired.

"Certainly, sir," the man replied. "There is no other in the flat, except an extension to this one, which rings into his lordship's bedroom."

"Do you mind seeing whether the extension is in order?"

"Certainly, Sir Jasper."

The man went out and reappeared a few minutes later.

"I cannot get any connection, sir," he confided. "It seems as though we were cut off somewhere."

Slane nodded.

"Your telephone has been tampered with," he announced. "I can't think how his lordship got through to me."

"His lordship spoke from the hall, Sir Jasper," Thomson explained. "He was downstairs questioning the commissionaire."

"You are sure that Mr. Cartwright replied up here?"

"Quite sure, Sir Jasper. I heard his voice distinctly."

"You couldn't hear what he said?"

"I didn't listen, sir," was the somewhat reproachful rejoinder.

"That's all right," Slane persisted, "but this is rather a serious affair. His lordship tells me that Mr. Cartwright has disappeared. We want to find him. If we could discover who he was talking with, it might help."

"I am sorry, sir, but I really didn't hear a word."

"Did Mr. Cartwright seem disturbed at all?"

"I couldn't answer for that either, Sir Jasper. I was busy clearing away in the dining-room. His lordship likes the drinks in the library early. I only know that I heard Mr. Cartwright's voice speaking, and that about two minutes afterwards, when I came through the hall, there was no one there, and his cards were upon the table."

"What about his coat and hat?"

"They are both here, sir, and

if I might venture to point out something, he certainly wouldn't attempt to leave the building without them. It's a cold night, and snowing hard."

"Good," Slane murmured. "It's always as well to start with some definite premise. Mr. Cartwright is still in the building. Ergo, if we search the building we will find him. . . ."

"Well, what about it?" Minchingham asked as Slane re-entered the room.

"You are right," the latter acknowledged. "Ronny Cartwright has disappeared, apparently, in the full, dramatic sense of the word. His hat and coat are in the hall, his cards are still upon the little table, and your telephone has been cut."

They all glanced at one another uncomfortably.

"Look here," Goring Brett observed, "miracles don't happen nowadays. There must be some quite ordinary explanation of this."

"There most probably is," Slane agreed. "Let's set to work to discover it. I suggest, Minchingham, that you three search this flat thoroughly. Whilst you do that, I'll go and have a word with the commissionaire, and tackle the Princess afterwards if necessary."

"That goes," Minchingham assented. "Come along, you fellows."

The commissionaire proved to be a person whom it was impossible to suspect of either inattention to his duties or conspiracy in any shape or form. He was a tall, burly fellow, an ex-non-commissioned officer in the Guards, with a formidable row of medals, and a convincing alertness of manner. He declared, with emphasis and without reserve, that since the entrance of the three bridge guests, no stranger of any sort whatever had arrived at, or left the flats. The lift-man was equally certain that he had not been summoned since he had taken the three gentlemen up to the card party, nor had he left his post, except to bring Lord Minchingham down to question the commissionaire. Accompanied by the latter, Slane mounted to the first floor and examined the entrance to each of the various offices. There were no lights burning in any one of them, and the fastening of every lock was secure. Slane descended to the ground floor again with the commissionaire.

"What sort of people are these tenants?" Slane asked. "Respectable, eh?"

"They wouldn't be here if they weren't, sir," the man replied confidently. "There's Mr. Hubble, the lawyer. He's got the best suite. I saw him leave early this evening. His articled clerk wasn't long after him, and his two other clerks and office boy were gone by six o'clock. Then there's a Mr. Simpson—an American film

agent. He's been here three years. Him and his young lady typist, they left together somewhere about seven. Then there's another lawyer, a Mr. Swayles, and Mr. Michael—he's a kind of collector of rare furs and Oriental bric-a-brac. There wasn't one of them, sir, who didn't have to produce pretty good references before he got a foothold here."

"I see," Slane murmured. "Then the only two residential flats are Lord Minchingham's and the one below. Now tell me about the tenants here."

"It's a widowed lady, sir," the commissionaire confided, his tone and manner becoming deeply respectful. "She is some sort of princess, I believe, though only Russian. She very seldom goes out, but there's a-many comes to see her. Very kindly, generous lady, sir, and the best tenant these flats have ever had. We get all sorts of nobility here now and then calling on her."

"What does the household consist of?" Slane inquired.

"There's a companion—a young lady—her private maid, two women servants and three men servants."

"She's not poor then, like most of the Russians?"

The sergeant smiled in almost pitying fashion.

"Not she," he declared. "I should say she's got all she wanted—wine and flowers, and all the best foods from the tip-top tradespeople. The dressmakers come and wait upon her themselves. She has two motor-cars, and the finest private box in the house whenever she goes to the theatre or opera. Plenty of money there, sir."

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you for your information," Slane said, slipping a pound note into his hand. "I don't seem to have come any nearer a solution of this business, but what you have told me is certainly helpful."

The man looked at the pound note. His manner was respectful, but a little dubious.

"It's too much, this, sir, just for answering a few questions," he remonstrated.

"You shall earn it, then," Slane told him, "by answering just one more question. You have one of the new telephone home exchanges here, I see. Very useful things, they are, for small flats. Now, can you tell me why the wire entering Lord Minchingham's number in the case there is cut? There you are, you see—two inches above the stand."

The commissionaire swung round to face the instrument. He stared at the severed cord, and his mouth grew wider and wider open. His eyes were positively bulbous.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "It was all right last time I looked that way. I'll swear it was."

"It was all right at a quarter past nine," Slane declared, "be-

cause his lordship rang me up at the Lavender Club. Who else has been down in the hall since then?"

The commissionaire's face was a study in bewilderment. He could scarcely take his eyes off the cut cord.

"Why, no one out of the usual, sir. Just me and William, the liftman. There was the Princess's maid went out with the two little dogs, same as she does every now and then. One of the men servants came down to smoke a cigarette, and waited for her out in the street. I can't remember another soul, sir. Certainly, there's no one from outside has entered this building, and no one has left it that hasn't come back.

"Very well," Slane said, "we'll leave it at that. You've no idea who cut the telephone? That's a part of the mystery, I suppose. Now tell me. You look like a man of common sense. You know as much of the affair as we do. Where should you think this gentleman, Mr. Cartwright, could have got to?"

"Throwed himself out of one of the windows, I should think, sir," the man replied. "I can't think of any other way he could have disappeared without passing out of the front door. The only thing that seems to me possible is that he may have been a friend of the Princess's. The telephone call may have been from her. He may have slipped down there, and been taken ill, or something of that sort. It don't sound likely, of course, as you say the gentleman had sat down to play a game of cards, but then nothing sounds likely."

Slane nodded.

"You're quite right," he admitted. "Nothing sounds likely. You will be here for at least an hour, won't you?"

"I shall be here until you leave this place," the man declared vigorously. "I'll be here to let you out, whatever time you come down."

Slane took the lift to Minchingham's apartments. The three men were waiting eagerly for his coming.

"We have searched every corner of the place," Minchingham announced. "Thomson has been up in the garrets. Whatever has become of Cartwright, he isn't here. Have you had any luck?"

"None at all," Slane replied. "We are narrowing the thing down, though. The Princess is our last hope. I am going there now."

"Then for heaven's sake take a drink first," his host suggested. "You need all your nerve to pay an eleven o'clock call there upon such an errand."

Slane helped himself to a whiskey and soda, and sat for a moment upon the arm of an easy-chair.

"Ronny wasn't in any sort of trouble, I suppose?" he asked.

"Not he," Minchingham replied forcibly. "He was going

strong with his job. I have never seen the fellow so keen and well in his life."

"Any woman around?"

"Only one—his wife. Sweetest little thing you ever saw. She and Ronny are extremely devoted to each other."

Slane finished his whiskey and soda, and set down the empty glass.

"So that's that," he said. "Now for our last hope! . . ."

Once or twice lately Slane had asked himself half in derision, whether by continually focusing his mind upon certain subjects he had not become psychic. Certain it was that after he had left Minchingham's flat and begun the descent of those few stairs which lay between him and his destination he had a feeling that he was moving towards the solution of this baffling mystery. He paused before the dark mahogany door, and rang the bell. A grave and irreproachably dressed man servant answered his summons almost immediately.

"Is the Princess at home?" Slane inquired.

The man was obviously surprised.

"Her Highness is at home," he admitted, "but she does not, as a rule, receive. Have you an appointment, sir?"

Slane shook his head.

"Mine is quite unexpected business," he confided. "Please take my card to her, and ask her if she will give me a brief interview."

The man accepted the card, and disappeared. There was the sound of surprised feminine voices from the room which he had entered. He returned, however, without undue delay.

"Will you come this way, sir?" he invited.

He ushered Slane at once into a delightfully comfortable, though rather overheated, lounge sitting-room. An aristocratic-looking lady, with white hair brushed back from her forehead, dark eyes, dressed simply in black but wearing some very beautiful jewelry, looked across at him curiously. Close to her chair, a young girl, also in black, with heavy features, dark, strongly marked eyebrows, and narrow eyes, was seated with a book in her hand, apparently interrupted in the task of reading aloud. She, too, looked inquiringly at this visitor.

"Princess," Sir Jasper said, as the door closed, "I must apologize profoundly for this visit, and for intruding upon you at such an hour. All that I can do is to throw myself upon your consideration. May I explain my errand?"

"By all means," the Princess acquiesced, in a voice which, notwithstanding its foreign accent, was very sweet and mellow. "Will you please to sit down?" she added, waving him to a chair. "This is my companion, whose

presence you will not mind. Let me hear, please, what it is that you want from me at this strange hour of the evening."

"It is something which will, I am sure, sound absurd to you," Slane confessed, "so I shall first of all tell you of the predicament we are in. My friend who lives in the flat above, Lord Minchingham, had three other men to play bridge with him tonight. About an hour and a half ago—it may have been two hours—they were in the act of sitting down to their game when one of the party—a Mr. Cartwright—was summoned to the telephone. He left the room and did not return. In due course, Lord Minchingham went out to look for him. He had disappeared. That, Princess, was an hour and a half ago at least, and both the commissionaire and the liftman are ready to swear that he has not left the building. There is no other exit save by the front way. It remains, therefore, an incontrovertible fact that our missing friend is somewhere close at hand."

"This is very mysterious," the Princess murmured, with the air of one sufficiently intrigued.

"It is almost amazing," Slane agreed, glancing for a moment at the sullen face of the girl, who was listening attentively, but without any excessive show of interest. "Cartwright has not left this building. Very well—where can he be? We have explored thoroughly every inch of Lord Minchingham's flat. The offices which occupy the floor below you are every one of them locked, and to the best of the commissionaire's belief their tenants left at the usual time four or five hours ago. They are all unlighted and apparently unoccupied. You see, Princess, that leaves us only your apartments in the whole of this building. I am going to ask you the great favor of being allowed, in company with one of your servants, to search your flat."

The Princess's forehead was wrinkled in surprise. There was a little smile at the corners of her mouth. She was like a beautiful miniature, with her ivory skin, still brilliant eyes, and lips the color of which she had not neglected to deepen.

"But, Sir Jasper," she exclaimed, "this is incredible! I can assure you with every confidence that no gentleman has presented himself here this evening, for I have not left the salon. I do not receive nowadays, except my intimate friends, and I do not even know this Mr.—what did you call him?—Cartwright? Why should you imagine that he might by any possibility be in my flat?"

"Princess," Slane pointed out, "the suggestion seems as incredible to us as to you. Please try to realize our point of view. A man cannot dissolve into thin air, and it has been demonstrated that this gentleman must be in this build-

ing, every part of which, except your apartment, has been thoroughly explored. No other situation would have induced me to make a suggestion which I know quite well must sound unreasonable."

The Princess glanced at his card.

"I seem to know your name, Sir Jasper," she mused. "I go out so little that my circle of acquaintances is limited—but I fancy there is something familiar about it. You write, perhaps?"

"Very seldom. A few articles on crime from various angles. But I know the Countess Montzini quite well. She is, I believe, a friend of yours."

"Dear Olga!" the Princess murmured. "Of course she is. Well, have your own way, Sir Jasper. Ring the bell, Anna. We will hand this gentleman over to Grubling."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," Slane acknowledged, rising, "and so, I am sure, Lord Minchingham will be. I promise that I will be as little obtrusive as possible."

The Princess smiled at him.

"You will find my small apartments of scant interest to you, I fear," she observed. "Search them thoroughly, however, and come and see me before you leave, Sir Jasper. . . ."

Grubling, duly summoned, proved to be the usual type of tactician but perfectly well trained servant, and was evidently of either German or Russian nationality. He was not the man who had admitted Slane, but appeared to be a sort of major-domo. The Princess explained what was required. His stolid features showed no surprise.

"If the gentleman will follow me," he begged, with a stiff bow.

Under his tutelage, Slane proceeded to make a careful inspection of the whole flat. The Princess's bedroom and boudoir were, as one might have expected, miracles of daintiness combined with a certain sad splendor. Certainly, they bore no trace of any masculine visit. The apartment of Mademoiselle Anna was as bare as a domestic's—an iron bedstead spread, however, with fine linen, an iron cross on the wall opposite, and one beautiful picture of the Virgin. An unused sleeping apartment was stored with a number of priceless pieces of furniture and *objets d'art*. Cupboards in various places, which Grubling unlocked, were filled with glass and rare china. The servants' quarters were ordinary, but Slane explored them inch by inch, even to the telephone closet.

"There remains nothing else, sir," the man announced at last, respectfully. "You have been in every room and seen every cupboard."

Slane pressed a pound note into his hand, and regretted the trouble he had given. The man

accepted the note and opened once more the door of the salon. The Princess looked round with a little smile.

"Well," she mocked good-humoredly, "you did not find your friend concealed by chance under my bed or lurking in my wardrobe? He is good-looking, perhaps, this Mr. Cartwright. I have no doubt missed something."

Slane indulged in an apologetic gesture.

"My friend does not seem to have had the good fortune to have found his way here at all," he confessed. "It only remains for me to ask your pardon for this intrusion, and to thank you most gratefully."

She held up her fingers, and he was sufficiently versed in foreign customs to stoop and brush them with his lips. The girl's face, as she bade him good night, was expressionless.

"Come and see me again some day, Sir Jasper," the Princess invited. "You must at least, come and tell me all about your missing friend and where you found him."

"If you will allow me, I will certainly feel that I owe you that courtesy," Slane replied.

He was on his way to the door, more bewildered than ever. Even his instinct had been at fault. Without a doubt it was impossible that Cartwright could be in the flat. And then, for a moment, he hesitated, and a little thrill stole through his pulse. Upon a round mahogany table stood a great bowl of lilies, and in the shadow of the bowl there was something crumpled up, barely recognizable, which brought the light shooting into his eyes. He paused, stooped down to smell the flowers, and his fingers closed upon a very unconsidered trifle—something just out of sight of the Princess and her companion. Grubbing was holding the door open. Mademoiselle Anna had picked up her book ready to recommence the reading. The Princess was leaning over towards an ivory box filled with cigarettes, her dainty fingers extended. Slane, with a farewell bow, passed out.

They were all three waiting for him impatiently when he reentered the library of the flat above. The cards were still upon the table.

"Well?" Minchingham inquired.

"Give me a whiskey and soda," Slane begged.

His host hastened to serve him.

"Any luck?"

"I don't know. Let me think for a moment. Count your cards, you fellows."

They came to the table, amazed at this strange request, but did as they were bidden, and reported thirteen each. Slane took up Cartwright's cards, which he had brought back from the hall, and

let them fall through his fingers one by one. From his trousers pocket he produced a crumpled-up playing card with the same back.

"Thirteen," he murmured, letting it drop on the top of the others.

They all stared at him.

"What the devil are you driving at?" Minchingham demanded, taking up the battered card.

"One second," Slane begged, "let's be certain of this. The card you have there, Minchingham, is the two of spades. Has anyone else the two of spades?"

"Not in my hand," Minchingham declared.

"Nor mine," Martin Phipps echoed.

"Nor mine," from Goring Brett.

Slane glanced through Cartwright's hand.

"There is no other two of spades," he announced. "This card, therefore, belongs to Cartwright's hand. He left twelve outside upon the table. When he was called or fetched away he took this one with him. I found it crumpled up as though he'd held it tightly in his hand in a moment of agitation, downstairs in the flat of the Princess Madziwill."

There was a brief period of stupified silence. No one at first succeeded in grasping the situation.

"What the devil did the fellow mean by going down there without a word to us?" Minchingham demanded.

"And not coming back?" Goring Brett added.

"Is he there now?" Martin Phipps asked.

"He is not there now," Slane assured them, "unless he has been dissolved into vapor or cut into small pieces and hidden in a hundred different places. When I first arrived the Princess showed nothing but mild amusement at my request. She put me in charge of a manservant, and I was shown over her apartments. I have explored every inch of them. She assured me, in the presence of her companion, that she had received no visitor, and that she had no knowledge of any Mr. Cartwright. She also told me that she had been in the salon the whole of the evening. Yet that card, which was in Cartwright's hand when he left the room, was in the salon."

Minchingham clasped his head between his hands.

"Get on with it, Slane," he begged. "You're driving us crazy."

"I'm pretty well that way myself," Slane retorted. "We have to go back for a moment to the commissionaire. I believe him when he says that no one has left the place. There is only that one front exit."

"Couldn't have jumped out of the window, could he?" Goring Brett suggested hesitatingly.

"Cartwright is a level-headed

fellow," Slane pointed out. "He is scarcely likely to indulge in a jump of sixty feet or so on to some spiked railings without some serious object. Nevertheless, I fancy that our next move must be to the street."

"Have you any theory at all?" Minchingham demanded, as they made their way towards the lift.

"Only the ghost of a one," was the frank avowal. . . .

"Any news, sir?" the lift-man inquired, throwing open the gates.

"Not at present."

"Has the gentleman turned up, sir?" the commissionaire asked eagerly, as he rose to receive them.

"No sign of him yet. Don't leave your place there. We're only just going outside."

They stood on the edge of the pavement. It was still a miserable night, but the driving snow had ceased. Slane backed a little into the street and looked up. On the ground floor were the large plate-glass windows of the Hanover Models, Limited, above four dark windows belonging to various offices. Then the windows of the Princess's flat, through the drawn curtains of which shone a faint streak of light. Slane, whose whole interest seemed to be centered in the windows immediately below the Princess's flat, called to the commissionaire, and pointed upward.

"Those streaks of light there," he asked, "belong, I imagine, to the apartment of the Princess?"

"That is so, sir," the man agreed.

"Now, whose offices are those below?"

"A gentleman named Michael, kind of an agent for furs and oriental things."

"What sort of a man is he?"

The commissionaire was dubious.

"One of them foreigners, sir," he confided. "Stout fellow, with a beard and kind of foreign way of dressing. His references were O.K., and he's got the premises for three years. Keeps two clerks there and a typist."

Slane's interest in the windows seemed to have abated. He crossed the pavement towards the main entrance of the flats.

"Upstairs for a minute," he begged. "Sergeant, we shall be back again directly. Don't relax. Something might happen, and above all let no one pass out."

"I'll see to that, sir," the man promised.

They shot up to the third floor. As soon as the door of the library was closed behind them, Slane turned to his host.

"Minchingham," he demanded, "have you a weapon of any sort, and an electric torch?"

"I've got one revolver," was the somewhat dazed reply. "Plenty of electric torches. What in God's name—"

"Just a minute or two, there's

a good fellow," Slane interrupted. "I may be making an absolute ass of myself, but give me a chance."

Minchingham ransacked a cupboard and discovered a revolver, which he handed to Slane, together with a torch.

"Come along down, you fellows, if you like," the latter invited. "I'm not going to do anything desperate. I'm just going to listen outside the premises of Mr. Michael. If there's no one there, there's nothing doing."

No one was willing to be left behind. They crept downstairs on tiptoe, found the brass plate indicating the offices of Messrs. Michael and Son, and grouped themselves round the door. There was no light to be seen inside, nor was there at first any sort of sound to be heard. A few breathless moments passed. Then Slane, who had been on his hands and knees on the floor, rose silently to his feet. There was a gleam in his eyes and a new tenseness in his manner. He beckoned to the others to follow him, and they descended to the hall. The sergeant was still at his post, and the lift-man was seated in his chair.

"Sergeant," Slane confided, "there's something wrong upstairs."

"Where, sir?" the man demanded, startled.

"Never mind. Take this gun whilst I telephone. Don't let a soul leave this place."

"I don't need a gun, sir," the commissionaire declared confidently. "There's no one could pass out of here against my will."

"If you were Jack Dempsey, you'd need a gun if the other man had one," was the dry rejoinder. "You keep it, Sergeant. Minchingham, I'm going to telephone to Scotland Yard. When things are in train I'll tell you what's in my mind."

Minchingham nodded.

"Go ahead, old chap," he enjoined. "I leave everything to you."

Slane crossed towards the telephone. Suddenly he paused. Everyone in the little group seemed electrified. It was a small happening, but somehow or other it had almost a paralyzing effect upon them all. The lift-bell rang!

There was a moment's silence, broken by Slane, with a quick, imperative question.

"Who'd be going out at this time of night, Sergeant?"

"I can't imagine, sir," the man acknowledged.

The attendant banged the iron doors to and glided up. With only a few seconds' delay the lift reappeared. Out stepped Mademoiselle Anna, in a thick coat, carrying an umbrella, and a small Pekinese under her arm. She made her way towards the door, but Slane blocked her progress.

"Sorry, Mademoiselle," he apologized, "but do you think your little dog could dispense

with his exercise tonight? He has already been out, hasn't he?"

She looked at him with flashing eyes.

"He goes out several times every night," she replied. "We are late because you upset the Princess. He must certainly go as far as the corner."

She would have pushed her way past him, but Slane did not move.

"Mademoiselle," he said gravely, "the dog, after all, is not a vital affair. An order has been given that no one should leave this place until a certain matter has been cleared up."

Her eyes were full of anger.

"Who is there to give such an order?" she demanded, making another effort to pass.

Slane held her by the shoulder.

"Mademoiselle," he insisted, "you will not be permitted to reach the street. You will not be permitted to return even from whence you came. Sergeant, take care of this young lady for a few moments. I will hold you blameless in case there is any trouble."

She opened her mouth to shriek, but the commissionaire's hand was upon her lips. Slane stepped past her to the office telephone.

"Give me 1000Y," he begged. "Quickly, please. It's a police call. . . . That Scotland Yard? . . . Sir Jasper Slane speaking. I don't suppose that by any chance Inspector Stimpson is in? . . . What's that? Just come in from Deptford? Ask him if he can speak with me. . . . Sent for a taxi, has he? Never mind. Tell him I have urgent business for him. He had better bring three or four men, and come himself, to Cunningham Mansions. I'll be waiting for him in the hall. Ask him to make it as quickly as possible."

He rang off. The girl was still struggling.

"Look here," Slane remonstrated, "you'll do yourself no good going on like this. The game's up, whatever it was. Where's Mr. Cartwright?"

"What do I know about Mr. Cartwright," she fumed.

Slane shrugged his shoulders and turned away. She looked at him with the hatred of a wild animal. A tense quarter of an hour ensued. Then a motor car, followed by a taxi, drew up outside. Stimpson, accompanied by four constables, hastened in. Words flashed backwards and forwards without prelude.

"Michael and Son?" Stimpson repeated eagerly. "We've had information in about them during the last few days. First floor, did you say?"

"Give the inspector your passkey, Sergeant," Slane begged. "You can let the young woman go now, if you like."

There was no longer any attempt at concealment. They turned on the lights in the corridor as they reached the first floor.

Stimpson glanced all around.

"I'd keep these gentlemen out of it, if I were you, sir," he advised, turning to Slane. "If you've stumbled up against the crowd I think you have, they're likely to show fight."

No one took any notice, and the sergeant, producing his passkey, opened up the premises of Messrs. Michael and Son. Entering, the little party of men found themselves in a sort of showroom, with glass cases on stands down the center, and a few rare furs hanging on the walls. A touch of the switch, and the room was flooded with light. At the same moment, from the transom of the office beyond, a light flashed out and disappeared.

"Send two of your men back to the hall, Stimpson," Slane begged. "There's a trap-door from the apartment above down to the office here. They may try to get up that way, and down the stairs."

Stimpson gave swift orders, and afterwards they pressed forward. The office door was locked, but once more the sergeant's passkey was successful. Stimpson thrust his gun through the opening, and followed it cautiously. The room was empty except for one man seated in a chair, to which he was closely bound. Dangling from the ceiling was a beautifully made rope ladder.

"Good for you, Jasper, old chap!" Cartwright, who was partially gagged, croaked. "Cut these blasted cords, someone."

The thing was done in a moment. Cartwright pointed to the rope ladder.

"Quick, some of you fellows," he enjoined. "There's a trapdoor there to the Princess's kitchen. It was that butler of hers who got me. He's just gone up with Michael. Quick, or they'll get down the stairs!"

Slane smiled reassuringly.

"Their welcome's waiting for them in the hall right enough," he promised. "Don't you worry, Cartwright."

"What the devil do you mean by breaking up a rubber like that," Minchingham demanded.

Cartwright grinned feebly.

"What the devil do you mean by living over a gang of Bolshies?" he muttered. "Lead me to a whiskey and soda."

On the following evening, Jasper Slane was the honored guest at the house of a Cabinet Minister. Certain matters were there explained to him.

"I should find it difficult," his host declared pompously, "to express to you, Sir Jasper, how indebted the government of this country feels towards you for your services of last night. I will frankly admit that all our own men were on the wrong track. We knew of the existence of this gang —the infinite mischief they were doing—but we never associated

the Princess Madziwill with anything of the sort. It seems now that she escaped from Russia and saved her fortune by espousing Bolshevist doctrines. By degrees, it appears, so far as I can learn, she actually adopted them honestly and from a certain amount of conviction. Anyhow, she has been furnishing the Soviet people here and in Moscow with amazing information week after week. This last affair—Cartwright has explained that, I suppose?"

"Not thoroughly," Slane admitted.

"Well, there's a steamer coming up the Channel now with a million pounds worth of Soviet gold on board," the Cabinet Minister confided. "The Soviet envoy here was beside himself to find out what the Cabinet had decided about seizing it. Cartwright was practically the only man outside the Cabinet who knew. He's been followed for days. They got him last night by a most transparent trick."

"Rang me up at Minchingham's," Cartwright intervened from the other side of the table, "and gave me the Foreign Office password for "Wanted immediately." I recognized the password, which has never yet failed, and did just as I was told—descended by the stairs to speak to a messenger who was waiting in the Princess's flat. I just remembered hearing the butler behind me whilst I was bowing over her fingers, and the next thing I knew I was in that office below. I sat there with a gun pushed into my ribs for at least an hour, and they were just planning a little further amusement for me, I think, when you fellows came along."

"What are you doing with them, sir?" Slane asked his host.

"There I'm afraid our attitude to you must be a little apologetic," the Cabinet Minister confessed. "We are particularly anxious to avoid a crisis at the present moment. The Princess left this morning for the South of France. She will never return to England. Grubling, Michael, his son, and the Princess's other two servants, have been deported. They left from Hull this afternoon. You have performed a great service to the State, Sir Jasper, and we shall know how to reward it, but there will be nothing in the papers of any raid on Cunningham Mansions."

"I'm quite content, sir," Slane assured his host. "So far as I was concerned, except for a certain amount of anxiety, it was a most pleasant and exciting evening."

Cartwright leaned forward from across the table.

"Tell me," he begged, "how did you tumble to the fact that I was, or had been, in the Princess's flat?"

"The two of spades—your thirteenth card," Slane confided.

the candid corpse

by . . . James M. Fox

The terrible, sluggish thing in his mind came to writhing life. He saw Jeffries gulping the tomato juice cocktail. . . .

IT WAS nine when Johnny Cochran awakened—the time he usually arrived at the office on Saturday. He stared at the drawn venetian blinds for some minutes, his mind lazily reviewing the hectic events of the night before, then turned and looked across at Lois' bed.

It was a tangle of blankets and twisted sheets, the crumpled pillow hanging drunkenly over the edge. Worry gathered in tiny lines around Johnny's eyes as he listened for a stir of movement in the house, running water—anything. There was nothing. Johnny flung back the covers and swung his feet to the floor. He listened again, then padded through the hallway to the kitchen, the frown on his face belying a cheerful whistle. On the sink was a note. It read simply, "Club breakfast." Johnny stopped whistling abruptly and his face cleared.

"She's got to see a doctor about those headaches!" he mused aloud and went back down the hall to the bathroom.

After he had showered, shaved

A former international lawyer, with offices in Amsterdam, Djakarta and New York, and a wartime Intelligence chief, Fox—who, incidentally, speaks six languages and was once arrested as a spy in Japan—is the author of more than a dozen novels and an illustration of what Leslie Charteris had in mind when he wrote that many writers have led varied, eventful and even improbable lives.

and dressed, he called Harry at the office.

"It's Johnny," he said, when his partner answered the phone. "I'm leaving home now."

There was silence at the other end of the wire.

"Hello!" Johnny said.

"Okay," Harry Hampton acknowledged, "I heard you." He sounded harassed.

"What's the matter?"

Another interval, then his partner said reluctantly, "Nothing."

"Ericson phone you?"

"No."

"I'll be seeing you," Johnny told him, mystified, and hung up.

Outside, he found it cool and a blanket overcast of high, gray clouds. The air was still—and wet. "Make the San Fernando Valley your home!" Johnny crooned sourly and climbed into his coupé.

A light mist formed on the windshield as he wheeled along the highway toward Los Angeles. There was little traffic and Johnny kept the speedometer flickering at fifty until he reached the dip where the road went under a freeway. As the radiator slanted downward, there was a sharp, explosive sound. Instinctively, Johnny ducked behind the wheel and his foot jerked away from the throttle. The coupé coasted on under the freeway, exhaust muttering throatily and windshield wipers squeaking protest. A safe distance beyond, Johnny pulled over and stopped.

A frayed, round hole had appeared in the windshield, and his right cheek smarted from flying chips of glass. He looked back through the rear window and said the things that came loose from his throat.

The overpass was really a bridge, its concrete sides containing narrow loopholes. The shot had been fired from one of them. There was no movement on the bridge, but the embankments at both approaches meant a person could crouch and run off either end.

No feeder road led up to the freeway and Johnny felt dubious about exploring on foot. He drove on and pulled in at the next service station. Using its telephone, he called the sheriff's office to report the incident.

"It isn't the first time some punk has shot at cars from that bridge," he heatedly told the deputy who answered, "and somebody damned near got me this morning. Am I out of line in suggesting you guys do something about it?"

The lawman assured him he wasn't.

"Well, be sure to take his library card away, if you catch up with him!" Johnny said bitterly and slammed the receiver back on its hook.

It was a quarter after ten when he circled the office building that

squatted in the shadow of Radio City, and drove into the parking lot. He climbed the back stairs to the second floor and walked through the long center hallway to the front of the building. Few of the offices were open and only subdued, restless sounds came out of these.

Johnny opened the door that said "Telescript Productions" on its frosted glass, went by the neat desk where the secretary held forth on weekdays and barged into Harry's private office.

His partner was behind the desk, his ordinarily glum face drawn and pale. A slender man with a young face and bushy white hair had a gray gabardine-covered thigh planted on one corner of the desk. A shorter, stockier, older man stood at the window, his back to the room.

"Hi!" Johnny said uneasily, sensing something was afoot.

The slender man grinned boyishly and said good morning. The one at the window turned his head, glanced at Johnny, then stared down into the street again. Harry Hampton fished a cigarette from a package on his desk and tapped the end of it against a thumbnail, his eyes dark with worry.

"This is Lieutenant Haynes," he informed Johnny, indicating the man perched on the desk, "and Sergeant King," he nodded toward the stocky figure at the window. "They—"

"Why don't you get that cup of coffee, Mr. Hampton," the slender detective broke in smoothly, "while we have a chat with your partner?"

Harry got up slowly, the unlighted cigarette between his lips, gave Johnny a warning glance and went out. His footsteps dwindled down the hall, uncertainly.

"Sit down, Mr. Cochran," Lieutenant Haynes said.

It didn't sound like a command or even like a request, but Johnny sat down anyway. He was sorry as soon as he did, because he instantly felt the psychological disadvantage of being on a lower level. An unaccountable tension tightened his muscles.

"Now that we're cozy," Johnny said wryly, "it's only fair to warn you that I'll deny everything and admit nothing. What's the beef?"

The dapper lieutenant smiled. "Would you mind answering a few questions for us first, Mr. Cochran?"

Johnny stared up at the detective and decided that he didn't like the smile.

"I think I'll stand on my constitutional rights," he said.

The lieutenant's smile drew down at the corners. He nodded toward the window and a soft scuff of shoes answered the signal. Johnny turned just in time to jerk his wrist out from under Sergeant King's descending grip. Handcuff's dangled from the stocky man's other hand. Shock froze

Johnny's face for seconds, then anger took its place.

"Hold on, you guys!" he said indignantly. "What kind of a deal is this? What's the charge anyway?"

The two men looked at him and then exchanged glances. The lieutenant wagged his head and clucked his tongue sadly.

"You hear that, Joe?" he asked his companion, "Mr. Cochran wants a formal arrest. Do you remember how it goes?"

Sergeant King frowned at the ceiling, spinning the handcuffs with a stubby forefinger.

"We have to inform him of our intention to arrest him, don't we?"

"That's correct," the lieutenant approved wholeheartedly.

"And that we have the authority to make it," the other continued gravely.

"Very good!"

"And of the nature of the charge."

"Excellent! And what charge do you have in mind here, Joe?"

The older detective frowned again, then his face cleared. "I'm sure I'll think of something before we get to the station, Lieutenant," he suggested respectfully.

"That won't do," Haynes said firmly. "Mr. Cochran wants a definite charge placed on him before we take another step."

"Well, robbery is always a good charge," King said hopefully. "He fits the description of the suspect who pulled that liquor store holdup on Crenshaw last night."

"Do you have that description with you, Joe?"

"Yes, sir," the stocky man assured him. He dug a dogeared notebook from an inside pocket and leafed through it with a heavy thumb. "Here it is, 'One male caucasian—dark clothing—no hat.' "

"Is that all?" Haynes asked, lifting his eyebrows.

"The manager didn't get too good a look," Sergeant King said apologetically. "The guy braced him just when he snapped off the lights and started to lock the door."

"Well, Joe, I sure have to hand it to you! You certainly deserve a lot of credit for this day's work—and with so little to go on!"

"Thanks, Lieutenant," the stocky detective said gratefully.

"You two clowns should be a cinch on television—'til it grows up!" Johnny observed bitterly.

The dapper lieutenant extracted a cork-tipped cigarette from a silver case, lighted it and blew a funnel of smoke ceilingward.

"There's one thing, Sergeant, that comes to my mind," he said thoughtfully, ignoring Johnny. "Wasn't a liquor store man killed in a similar holdup a couple of years ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't that case still open?"

"I guess it is at that!"

"Then maybe we'd better make the charge suspicion of murder. We don't want this character bailing out and becoming a fugitive from justice."

"I couldn't run," Johnny said grimly. "I'm laughing too hard. If I'd had breakfast, I'd let you take me in. Let's start all over again. The way it looks, you guys have lost your marbles and you think they're in my jeans. They're not, but I can see where you need help. So go ahead and ask me anything you like—I'll try to get you straightened out."

Lieutenant Haynes smiled happily; his tone changed instantly to smooth civility. "This is my problem, Mr. Cochran. We're interested in your version of the movements of a man named Ronald Jeffries. One of our traffic officers arrested him last night and booked him at Wilshire Station when he ran a stop light and refused to sign the tag. Your partner, Mr. Hampton, put up his bail and I hear they went directly to a dinner party from the station. I understand you met them there."

"That's right."

"They arrived at the party before you did?"

"I was delayed."

"I see. When you came in, did you notice that Mr. Jeffries was drinking?"

"Oh, sure, I saw him take a drink."

"How long would that be before dinner was served?"

"Maybe ten minutes," Johnny said, and frowned.

"Do you think Mr. Jeffries had more than that one drink while you were there?"

"I know he didn't."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm positive. I had my eagle eye on him."

"But he was drunk already, wasn't he?"

"Oh, I suppose so," Johnny said irritably. "He usually is. He passed out shortly after we'd sat down."

"How shortly, Mr. Cochran?"

"During dinner."

"Say twenty minutes after taking his last drink?"

A cold lump began to form in the bottom of Johnny's stomach. He stared at the boyish face above him.

"Just about that," he said slowly.

"Did Mr. Jeffries stagger when he went into dinner?"

"No—not exactly."

"Could you tell me the order in which the guests were seated, Mr. Cochran?"

"Frankly, I wasn't paying much attention."

"Well, would you say Mr. Jeffries was one of the first to sit down, or one of the last?"

The icy growth in Johnny's stomach had reached his throat and was contracting it.

"He was one of the last to sit down, I think," he answered carefully.

"It was a large, round table, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"Is it your recollection that everybody was seated before Mr. Jeffries sat down?"

"No, I sat down after he did."

"You were taking pictures with a candid camera as the guests came in, weren't you?"

"Well, yeah, I was. Just for a gag."

The detective raised his eyebrows in polite acknowledgement. "You're an experienced photographer, I understand," he said.

"It's just a hobby."

"Surely. Just a hobby. But you spend a lot of time and dough on it?"

"Not such an awful lot."

"You've got a darkroom of your own at home? Do your own printing and developing?"

"I don't see what you're driving at," said Johnny slowly. "Is that bad?"

The stocky officer, back at the window, made a noise that sounded like a cross between a chuckle and a snort. Lieutenant Haynes merely resumed his civil smile. "Let's get back to last night," he said. "The way we hear, this Mr. Jeffries was the next to last man to sit down to dinner, and you were the last?"

"That's the way I remember it," Johnny said slowly. His mouth felt dry and his tongue big.

"And you sat down between a Miss Rosalind Gordon and Mr. Jeffries—Mr. Jeffries being on your left?" his questioner urged carefully.

A sense of horror was developing in Johnny. Recollection stirred clammily in his mind without quite making itself known. He nodded, trying to bring the thing out in the open, so that he could see what it was.

"Did anything peculiar happen during dinner?" Lieutenant Haynes asked softly.

The terrible, sluggish thing in Johnny's mind came to writhing life. Its long, slimy tentacles wrapped around his brain and fished exploringly inside his stomach. A wave of nausea swept upward to stifle his throat. The picture that swooped into his mind with startling suddenness was one of Ronald Jeffries gulping a tomato juice cocktail from a bell topped glass, and the red fluid trickling down his chin.

"You took him away from the table, Mr. Cochran, didn't you?" the detective asked softly.

"He—he was drunk!"

"He'd walked to the table," the lieutenant said, "he wasn't so drunk."

"The tomato juice!" Johnny said thickly.

Lieutenant Haynes leaned in over the desk. "He groaned, didn't he, Mr. Cochran? Why didn't you call a doctor?"

"I—I—"

"You were afraid to call a doctor—and besides—you wanted

him to die! You'd put some stuff in his tomato juice. Isn't that true, Mr. Cochran?"

"You're crazy!"

"Some stuff you'd brought along with you, that came out of that darkroom at your house. You didn't expect it to take effect so quickly, but Jeffries was drunk—and it did! You rushed him away from the table and left him in the bedroom to die. Isn't that how it was?"

"No!" Johnny said weakly, shaking his head, "I—I had no idea—"

"You'd planned to drop the vial in his pocket, but you got a little rattled when the stuff took hold so fast. What did you do with that vial, Mr. Cochran?"

Johnny wagged his head helplessly, dizzy with nausea.

"You poisoned him, Mr. Cochran. Nobody else had a chance. There were no place cards—nobody knew where Jeffries was going to sit! You were the only one who could have put that little pinch of sodium cyanide into his glass once he'd sat down, and not be caught doing it. You were the only one with easy access to that kind of dope—only photographers can buy it with no questions asked. You bumped his elbow and pretended to help him keep from spilling his appetizer. You thought he would get drowsy first, but he got sick instead. When the other guests heard him groan, you said he was okay. He was dying, but that was all right with you. That was the way you wanted it after all."

Johnny tried to deny the hammering accusations, but the detective went on relentlessly.

"You wanted it that way, but it worried you. Jeffries was supposed to eat his dinner and then become drowsy. It didn't work out. That made it dangerous. That pointed a finger right at the tomato juice. It worried you so much that later on you deliberately forgot your camera, for an excuse, so that you could come back and get rid of the glass with the poison in it. Only the busboys had already taken it away. That was good—that helped. But it wasn't enough, Mr. Cochran. We can still prove the cyanide was there in that tomato juice!"

"You can't prove something that's not true!" Johnny said shakily.

"It's true, and we've already proved it! You hitched your wagon to a falling star—when you signed Jeffries on a long term contract. You bet your shirt against a whiskey bottle—and you lost! Jeffries got eased out of the movies on a bum contract, so he crossed off the fine print before he signed another one. Where is that contract, Mr. Cochran?"

"In there," Johnny said wearily.

Haynes slid off the desk and opened the connecting door to Johnny's private office.

"Excuse me," Sergeant King said quietly.

Johnny looked blankly into the stocky detective's face and then realized the man wanted him to move. He got up and walked around to the front of the desk. The detective carefully hitched up his trouser legs and knelt down on the carpet. He reached under the desk and dragged a small wire recorder into view.

There was a rustle of papers from the other office and Johnny looked through the open doorway. Lieutenant Haynes was frowning over Jeffries' contract. For a split second, Johnny considered the positions of the two men, then he took one long step toward the corridor door, wrenched it open, darted through and slammed it shut behind him.

Some things in life are easily apparent; some are not. Man can be certain that Destiny hovers over him—and at times he can hear the beating of wings. Johnny had been hearing an ominous rustle ever since Telescript Productions had finished shooting the pilot film of THE MAN OF THE HOUSE. That Friday afternoon, he'd been up to his neck in scripts when the connecting door to his partner's office opened and Harry Hampton came in. Harry was wearing the troubled look that Johnny suspected stayed on his face even in sleep.

"Okay," Johnny said, grinning cheerfully, "so the rent's due!"

There were times when Harry could manage a smile, but this didn't seem to be one of them. He flung his big, uncomfortable body into a chair, rumpled his stubborn, sandy hair and glumly contemplated the toes of his shoes.

"Good news or bad," Johnny wanted to know, still facetious. "On your face, I can't tell."

"No news," Harry said morosely. "Ronny is off to the races again. He won't take Angelica to the party."

Johnny blew through pursed lips and then grimaced. "He's one sweet guy! Well, I'm a happily married man—and Lois is meeting me—so that leaves you. Want me to give Angelica a ring?" He reached out for the phone.

His partner made an impatient gesture. "I'm not worried about her. It's Ronny's contract that's bothering me."

"I know what you mean!" Johnny admitted regretfully. "Was he loaded again?"

"He might've had a mouthful of shredded wheat," his partner said, with bitterness.

Johnny wagged his head sadly. "In other words, we stand a good chance of repeating history, instead of making it!"

"Unless his contract leaves us some kind of an out."

Johnny got the impression that Harry was dumping the deal into his lap. In this, there was a certain justice, because it had been Johnny's idea to resurrect Ronald

Jeffries for television. The partners had dreamed up a show that called for an accomplished actor and there just hadn't been any around of the proper caliber who'd take a chance on something that might flop.

The show was expensive to produce, and a second-rate actor was out of the question. Johnny had suggested Jeffries, and Harry had balked because of the actor's background. The movie moguls had booted him out some ten years ago because of his bouts with the bottle.

"If I'd known how good Angelica was going to turn out," Johnny admitted, "I'd have left him interred."

"After tonight, we can bury the show with him," Harry prophesied gloomily. "What the devil do you suppose came up between him and Angelica? All the time we were shooting the picture, he wouldn't let her out of his sight."

"I can guess," Johnny told him. "The word 'no' just isn't included in Ronny's ego. When you pick up Angelica, see if she won't string him along until we can sell the show to Ericson."

Harry Hampton got to his feet, grinning crookedly. "She might play Little Red Riding Hood for you," he said, "but me she'd just tell to go shoo away the wolf!"

"Dammit," Johnny protested, coloring, "I didn't mean—oh, well—" He saw the look of dry amusement in his partner's eyes, flushed more deeply and subsided.

"I suppose you haven't noticed she's taken a fall for you!" Harry said derisively.

"You've got her wrong," Johnny told him, a little heatedly. "She kids around, but it's only for laughs."

"Sure, sure! Now what are we going to do about Ronny?"

"If we can keep him under wraps tonight and sell the show, we'll have the whiphand over him."

"That," Harry said emphatically, "I don't follow!"

"He'll be making a nice piece of change out of the show," Johnny explained, "and if he runs it off the air, it'll hurt him as much as it does us."

"It'll kill us!" Harry jeered. "We've got the wad bet on this show, and as I remember it, the more money Ronny used to make, the bigger the ass he made of himself!"

"Come what may," Johnny promised grimly, "the show is going on—with or without dear Ronny!"

His partner shrugged, unconvinced. "I'll brief Angelica," he relented. "It's after five. Are you leaving?"

"Not for awhile. I have another script I want to go over. Lois is meeting me at the hotel and I figured on snatching a shave and shower at your apartment. Okay?"

"Sure. If I've left for Angelica's, help yourself to a shirt

and the Scotch—anything you need."

"Will do—and thanks!" Johnny said gratefully.

He waited until he heard the corridor door close, then pitched the script to one side and dug a copy of Jeffries' contract from the file. Frowning, he began to go over it, far more worried than he cared to admit.

The party scheduled for eight-thirty that evening was being given by Hugh Ericson, head of the largest advertising agency on the Coast. He'd seen the pilot film and had immediately expressed his interest by inviting the two partners and Johnny's wife, Lois, to a party. He'd been insistent that they should bring the two stars of the show, Ronald Jeffries and Angelica Gilbert.

If there was a legal loophole in the contract the partners had with the actor, Johnny hadn't found it at seven o'clock, and he was to meet Lois in the hotel lobby at eight. Allowing himself ten minutes to get to Harry's apartment and twenty minutes from there to the hotel, gave him thirty minutes to shave and shower. He left the contract on his desk, snapped out the lights and left the office.

When Johnny wheeled his business coupé to the curb in front of the apartment house, he glanced at his wristwatch and grunted with satisfaction. It had taken him exactly ten minutes. Harry's car was not around, which indicated he had left for Angelica's. Johnny took the outside stairs two at a time and let himself into the apartment.

Going into the bedroom, he stripped down to his shorts, dug clean underclothing and a shirt from a dresser drawer, laid them out on the bed and went on into the bathroom. While he was laying out Harry's shaving gear, he remembered the invitation to help himself to a drink and went through the connecting door into the kitchen. There was no need to prowl around for the Scotch, as it occupied a prominent position on the sink. Johnny splashed a glass half full of the amber liquor, added ice cubes, purged it lightly with soda and took it back into the bathroom. After lathering, he shaved around his lips carefully and then polished off the drink in conjunction with the rest of the whiskers.

By the time he was in the shower, Johnny was beginning to feel a warm glow of relaxed well being. He sang lustily until it was time for a cold rinse, then hopped and howled under the stinging needle spray.

The cold water and a vigorous toweling left Johnny in the mood for another drink. The second Scotch and soda vanished during the act of dressing, and there was some doubt in his mind if he had time for a third. He decided it

had better be a short one and, oblivious of the fact that the bedroom and bath looked like a tornado had weaved an erratic course through it, he went back into the kitchen.

The third and last drink seemed to call for a toast. Johnny raised the glass thoughtfully and decided to put it into the form of a prayer.

"May Angelica be open to a reasonable proposition!" he said solemnly, and tipped the drink to his lips.

"And what," a voice asked sweetly from the living-room of the apartment, "is your idea of a reasonable proposition?"

Johnny grunted, choked and then thrust a wary head through the door into the other room. Angelica was curled in the corner of the couch like a sleepy kitten, the lamp on the end table warming her rich, brown hair and making soft shadows around her sweetly curved lips. She looked at him with serene and very lovely gray eyes. Ice cubes clinked musically from the glass she rotated between slender fingers.

"You—Harry—he—" Johnny stopped helplessly.

"You're trying to change the subject," Angelica accused, wrinkling a delicately uptilted nose.

"Were you supposed to meet Harry here?"

Angelica shook her head firmly and allowed one of the ice cubes in the glass to slip into her mouth. "M-m-mf-f!" she said, satisfaction in the sound.

"Well, what are you doing here then?" Johnny demanded crossly. "Don't you know he went over to your place to pick you up?"

"M-m-mf-f!" Angelica said again and closed her eyes tightly. There was a cracking crunch of demolished ice. She opened her eyes and smiled sleepily, looking pleased.

"How many teeth?" Johnny wanted to know, his voice weary.

"Don't you like ice?" Angelica asked innocently.

"In its place! You know where Harry is?"

"In jail."

Johnny stared at her in shocked disbelief, then sank down in a chair, moodily observing her elaborate unconcern.

"All right, honey child, take your time," he urged her, sarcasm in his voice.

Angelica looked hurt. She chewed ice thoughtfully and then shrugged. "I really should tease you a little," she said. "But I won't. Harry had to go down and bail Ronny out of jail. Ronny got a ticket and he wouldn't sign it. He said he wasn't guilty of—whatever he was guilty of—"

"That—" Johnny began grimly, and then clamped his lips together.

"The police think so too," Angelica assured him, "and they told Harry they'd be more than

happy if he would come down and get that—" she paused delicately, "out of their hair."

"You talked to Harry?"

"On the phone. He tried to catch you before you left the office and then asked me to phone here. You wouldn't answer, so I came on by. I've heard people sing in showers, but I didn't know they howled in them."

Johnny groaned and went into the kitchen for more Scotch. Angelica uncurled her sleek legs from the couch and followed him.

"It isn't serious," she said. "The bail's only twenty-five."

"This is only the beginning," Johnny said bitterly. "Wait till he gets to the party!"

"Do you think there's a chance that Mr. Ericson will buy the show?"

"Not after he meets Ronny!"

Angelica's beautiful eyes darkened with thought. "He's just a clown," she said finally.

Morosely, Johnny handed her another drink. "That was not the word I had in mind," he told her.

"Oh, I don't mean Ronny. It's Mr. Ericson who's a clown. He loves to get his picture in the paper, and he always mugs in them. You know he does!"

Johnny glanced at his watch, groaned again, took a long draught of Scotch and soda, then stared at her, his eyes widening.

"This," Angelica said solemnly, "calls for another toast. It's the first time you've ever really looked at me."

"You've put a finger on Ericson's weakness," he said excitedly.

"I wish you had one," she told him, her voice wistful.

"Polish off that drink and let's get going!"

They emptied their glasses and set them down, but Johnny caught her arm as she turned to the door.

"Just a minute," he said firmly. "Spit it out! My nerves won't stand it!"

There was astonished innocence in Angelica's limpid gray eyes, but they wavered under the firmness in his. Obediently, she removed another ice cube from between her pouting, rosy lips.

"What I have in mind," Johnny explained, as he half dragged her down the stairs, "is to pick up a camera at the office. Between the two of us, we should be able to handle Ericson and Jeffries. Right?"

She was silent, until they were well on their way to the office.

"Is that the reasonable proposition you had in mind?" she asked finally. "I'm to throw myself on the mercy of—that?"

"Well," Johnny admitted, a little uncomfortable. "I thought if —well you know—if you could play up to Ronny just a little bit—to kind of keep him out of mischief until we dispose of the show."

"How far shall I go?" Angelica asked sweetly.

Johnny reddened. "Just short of his touching you with his little finger," he said gruffly. "The show isn't worth that much to me —or to anybody else."

"I don't care about anybody else," she murmured, so softly that he wasn't sure those were her words.

It was almost a quarter of nine when Johnny sent the small coupé whining uphill on the steep side street that flanked the Hotel Royale.

Hugh Ericson answered the door of the penthouse apartment in response to his knock. He was a plump, nervous man in his early forties, with a pink face that looked freshly scrubbed, shaved and massaged.

"You're late," he accused them, his round blue eyes frankly admiring Angelica, "but no matter!"

Johnny glanced around the room, but Lois was nowhere in sight. Harry Hampton stood guard over Jeffries, who leaned on the bar in one corner and talked to a striking, sleekly gowned redhead. The actor was holding a double shot glass in his hand and downed its contents while Johnny watched. Ronald's hand wavered slightly as he returned the glass to the bar.

Ericson propelled them around the room and rattled off the introductions. There were three couples in addition to the redhead. The men were agency executives and immediately succumbed to Angelica's charm. Their wives appeared undecided.

The redhead's name turned out to be Rosalind Gordon. There seemed to be a different, cooler note in Ericson's voice when she was introduced. Johnny was puzzled—though the girl was not as young as he'd supposed, she was still stunning and apparently behaving herself. Why the advertising man should appear to resent her wasn't clear to him. Angelica recognized her as a singer and the redhead was obviously pleased. Jeffries listened with bored impatience while the two girls chatted, and Ericson excused himself. Johnny seized the opportunity to signal his partner aside.

"Where's Lois?" he asked him.

"She was in the lobby—waiting to tell you she had a terrific headache—and I told her she'd better go home. She was worried you'd think that she shouldn't."

"She ought to know better than that. How's Ronny doing?"

"Can't you see?"

"He's on his feet, and he's not bothering anybody—except the redhead. Who's she?"

Harry laughed harshly. "Ericson's fiancée. And that's only part of it. She used to be Ronny's girl friend."

"My stomach just collapsed,"

Johnny said weakly. "I think I'd better have a drink!"

"What's the camera for?"

Johnny told him.

"Nobody in their right mind would buy a show that depended on that screwball," Harry commented sourly. "Look at him!"

Trouble had developed between the actor and his former light of love. Jeffries' face was flushed and his eyes angry. He had the redhead's arm in a not too gentle grip and was urging her toward the door.

"Come on, Rosalind," he was saying thickly, his voice carrying across the room. "Let's get away from this menagerie."

Ericson saved the moment by pushing open folding doors just behind the two partners, revealing a dining room. There was a large, round table, resplendent with shining silver, slender candles and snow-white linen. Johnny whistled sharply and with exaggerated admiration.

"Mind if I switch on the lights and get a picture of that?" he asked the advertising man.

Ericson beamed happily. "Of course not! I'll get the crowd in here." He headed purposefully across the room to where Ronald and Rosalind argued near the door.

The two partners watched as Ericson clapped Jeffries on the back, talked briefly and then made a round of the room. Rosalind began urging the actor toward the dining room. Ronald looked sullen, but resigned.

"That's that!" Johnny observed, with relief. He slung his camera case over the back of a chair and took up a position in an opposite corner of the dining room. He began to snap pictures as the guests filed in.

Angelica had been quite right in her analysis of Ericson. The advertising man bustled about, getting people into the room and seated at the table, but his profile never got out of range of the camera lens. He seated Angelica on his right and beckoned Harry to circle the table and take the chair on his left.

Ronald and Rosalind trailed in at the rear of the other guests. Jeffries' eyes had the fixed, staring dullness of the very drunk, but his movements seemed sure enough. There was the barest hesitation on Rosalind's part, as though she were somewhat disconcerted with the seating arrangements, then she moved toward a chair.

Angelica's musical laugh echoed a little above the general chatter and Johnny saw that she was trying to attract his attention. Ericson was leaning toward her, his lips moving in a whisper, his eyes on Johnny. Angelica's wink telegraphed a signal. It was obvious the advertising executive was awaiting another candid camera shot. Johnny moved in for a closeup. It was the last picture

on the roll. When he went to retrieve his camera case, he found that Rosalind and Jeffries had left a vacant seat between them. Although it was possible that it was the result of his leaving the case slung over the back of the chair, Johnny was sure that Ronald was either sulking or Rosalind was trying to make it clear to her fiancé that the actor's attentions were undesirable.

In reaching for his napkin, Johnny collided with Jeffries' arm as the actor picked up a tomato juice cocktail. Unobtrusively, Johnny tried to steady the glass, but Ronald jerked it to one side and drank, some portion of it running down his chin.

Waiters came in through a connecting door and began serving. Jeffries gave a little groan as his plate was placed in front of him. Johnny took one look at the actor and saw he'd better get him away from the table. Ronald's face was pale and beaded with perspiration. Johnny hoisted him up to his feet, meeting resistance, but not much. They got to the bedroom without mishap and Johnny tried to steer the other's buckling legs toward the bath. Instead, Jeffries jerked loose and made a dive for the bed.

"You'd better get rid of some of that," Johnny warned him, but the actor groaned and closed his eyes. Letting well enough alone, Johnny went back into the dining room and closed the door.

"Is Ron all right?" the redhead asked him cautiously, when he sat down again.

He grinned at her, selfconsciously reassuring, and the party moved along; the tension that had been present in the air seemed gradually to disappear. Johnny managed to get in a casual reference to Jeffries' long retirement and the strain he'd been recently under while doing the show. He was surprised to find his host accepting the situation with evident good nature and brushing his embarrassed apologies aside. By midnight the agency men and their wives began to make polite noises, signifying departure. When the door closed behind them Johnny sought out Harry, but Ericson intercepted them when they headed for the bedroom.

"Let the poor devil sleep," he protested, with his nervous joviality. "I'll see Miss Gordon home and put him in a cab when I come back. The rest will fix him up like new."

"You might have a little trouble getting him on his way," Johnny pointed out.

Their host shrugged off that possibility and so the partners, with Angelica in tow, said their good-byes and left.

"I've got news for you," Angelica said calmly, as they waited for the elevator.

"Ericson propositioned you," Johnny said bitterly.

"You have a suspicious mind," she informed him. "He told me the show was a natural, and that Hollywood had holes in its head when it forced Ronny out of the movies."

Johnny and Harry stared at her incredulously.

"It's true," Angelica insisted firmly. "He knows all about Ronny's background and claims Ronny has always been misunderstood!"

"Now I've heard everything!" Johnny exclaimed. "Oh, brother, what a break!"

"Must be a catch in it somewhere," Harry predicted glumly.

Out in the parking lot, Harry told them good night and got in his own car, not offering to take Angelica home. Johnny had the key in the ignition when he remembered the camera. Leaving Angelica in the car, he started back to the hotel. Harry drove out as he reached the sidewalk.

"What's the matter?" Harry wanted to know.

"Camera," Johnny called and his partner laughed.

A waiter answered the door of Ericson's suite and Johnny found the advertising man and Rosalind had left. The waiter was reluctant to let him take the camera out of the dining room until Johnny showed him that the initials on the case matched the name on Johnny's business cards.

He rode down to the lobby again, went out the side entrance and started back across the dark, sloping street to the parking lot. He was well out into the street when a sudden black shadow loomed up on his left. Apprehension telegraphed a chilling alarm to Johnny's heart. He sucked in a quick breath and leaped backward. A glancing blow on his thigh sent him spinning, and the silent, rushing shadow plunged on past. It took him seconds recognizing that it was a driverless automobile. While he watched, it hurtled down the hill, gathering additional momentum with every yard, raced through the intersection at the bottom and piled into a parked car with a crash that echoed for several blocks. Johnny blew out a whoosh of breath and went across the street on shaky legs. Angelica came running from the lot to meet him.

"Somebody hit something?" she asked him breathlessly.

"You're not just fooling!" Johnny said, his heart still hammering against his ribs. "Only he doesn't know it yet."

It was past one o'clock when Johnny ran the coupé into his garage and closed the doors. He let himself in through the back door, raided the icebox for a glass of milk and went on into the bedroom. Quietly and without turning on the light, he began to undress. There was a stir of movement from one of the twin beds.

"How did it go?" Lois' voice asked listlessly.

"You awake, baby? It went all right. How's the headache?"

"So, so."

Johnny thought he saw a shudder move the blankets. He went over beside the bed and laid the back of his hand against her forehead. It was cool to his touch.

"You all right, baby?"

"Of course." She moved her head away from his hand.

"I can explain why I stood you up in the lobby. You feel up to listening?"

"Don't be silly. I didn't mind. I'm glad it turned out all right."

Johnny hung up his trousers and picked up his coat from the bed. The bulging pocket reminded him of the camera. He took it out and walked into his little darkroom with it down the hall. He had the light turned on in there and had the film out, with the loose end folded under, and was fumbling with the sealing tab when suddenly the roll spun from his fingers. He hung on to the tab, and the involuntary upward jerk he gave it caused the whole film to unwind. He swore at it in quick surprise.

"What's wrong?" Lois asked wearily.

He told her what, and kicked the tangled mess of film out of the darkroom down the hall, turned out the light and felt his way to bed with barefoot cautiousness. The last thing he was conscious of was Lois' endless turning and twisting, and he knew the migraine headache had retained its hold on her. He went to sleep with the tugging worry of her suffering on his mind.

Johnny raced down the hallway, his heart high and tight in his chest, hearing the stocky sergeant's quick cry of alarm. He made the turn at the stairway, plunged recklessly down to the landing, turned again and leaped down to the first floor level. Above him, feet pounded toward the top of the stairs, as his own legs drove him out the main entrance of the building.

Startled pedestrians gaped as he ran the length of the front of the building and ducked into the alley. He took an intersecting alley to his right and emerged on the next street. The first thing that caught his eye was a yellow cab caught by a red light. Without hesitating, Johnny darted between the curb line of cars, jerked the cab door open and jumped inside. The driver turned, startled, half angry.

"231 West Street," Johnny panted automatically, and realized, when the words were out, that he had given Angelica Gilbert's address.

"You're in a helluva hurry!" the driver complained, appraising him by means of the rear view mirror, eyes narrowed. He let out the clutch slowly, ignoring the sudden snarl of a horn at their rear.

"Kid's sick," Johnny got out, his heart pounding as if in the grip of an iron fist.

The cab jerked as the driver's foot shoved on the throttle. Gears whined into gathering speed. "That's different, bud," the cabby acknowledged, gruffly apologetic.

Johnny's hands trembled as he fished a cigarette from the pack in his coat pocket. The cab swayed, taking a corner.

"Bad?" the cabby wanted to know.

Johnny burned his fingers, getting the cigarette lighted from a match cupped in his palm.

"Don't know," he told the driver and, realizing that wasn't enough, added, "the missus was pretty excited. Probably don't amount to a hill of beans."

Johnny drew furiously on his smoke. He didn't want to go to Angelica's, but he hadn't the faintest notion where he should go. For the first few blocks, he waited for the wail of a siren to come up in their rear, but nothing happened. He almost asked the driver to pull over and let him out at the next main street. That was no good, though. The cabby might suspect the truth and keep him under observation. There didn't seem to be anything to do except stick to his guns.

A tense, fifteen-minute ride and the cab drew up in front of the red brick apartment building where Angelica lived. Johnny glanced at the meter, got out quickly and handed the driver two one-dollar-bills.

"Thanks a lot," he told the driver hastily.

"Want me to stick around?"

"No, thanks. The doctor's on his way."

The cabby nodded, pursed his lips and shifted gears.

"Okay. Hope it turns out all right."

Johnny took the apartment entrance stairs two at a time, burst through the street door and stopped inside. He let the door swing shut and stood there until the cab disappeared around the corner. Then, he reopened the door and started out when a startled voice cried his name from behind.

He groaned and turned to face Angelica. She was coming down the stairway, dressed in a gray tailored suit and a saucy gray hat.

"Well," she told him, when he said nothing, "I'd rather believe you came to see me and lost your nerve than have it turn out it's the blonde down the hall!"

"Where's your car, honey child?"

Her eyes went wide at the croak in his voice. She stared at his haggard face for seconds and then took him by the arm. "It's behind the building, Johnny. We can go out the back. I was just on my way to see you and Harry," she added.

"You've heard about Ronny?"

She nodded. "Two officers were

here this morning. They said it was a heart attack . . ."

"They think I poisoned him."

"Oh, no! They don't really believe that?"

"The hell they don't!"

She seemed shocked. "They asked an awful lot of questions," she admitted.

"They might not have gotten the kickback from the coroner yet, when they talked to you."

"But if they really thought you had something to do with it, they'd have arrested you!" she pointed out.

Johnny laughed harshly. "I cut the strings on them just when they were wrapping me up for delivery to the clink," he told her and related the incidents that had led him to her apartment house.

"I know where you can hide," Angelica said, her eyes glowing with excitement. "I have the keys to a cabin up at Big Bear, and the people are in the East. You can pose as a writer. They'll never find you there."

"Never is a long time," he reminded her.

"But they're sure to catch the real killer soon—"

"Not if they keep looking for me. I've got to get moving right now. If I know anything about cops, they'll come calling on you any minute."

"Where shall we go?"

"You're not going anywhere. I'd like to borrow your car, though."

"I want to help."

"There's nothing you can do, and there's no point in your getting mixed up in it."

"We'll talk while we drive along," Angelica urged. She unlocked her coupé and they climbed in.

"This is no good," Johnny argued, his face drawn with worry. "Drop me off at a drugstore—I've got to phone Lois."

"I'll let you off, but I'm going to wait for you. We'll drive around and talk it over. There must be something we can do toward catching the real murderer."

She backed out of the lot and drove down the side street, turning at the next corner. The next main boulevard she turned right and stayed on it until they came to a drugstore. She parked on a side street and Johnny walked back to the corner. Using the phone at the rear of the store he dialed the operator and gave his home number. He waited through ten rings and then hung up. Obviously, Lois hadn't returned from her club.

He went back to the car and tried to talk Angelica into going back home. She wouldn't listen. He climbed in reluctantly and they drove across town, keeping on side streets.

"Maybe you should have gone along with them," Angelica suggested. "You could have cleared yourself."

"I didn't see how—and I still

don't. They seem to know that the poison was put in Ronny's tomato juice cocktail, and I was the only one who could have put it there."

Angelica's pretty brow was lined in a frown. "You hadn't anymore than finished with the pictures and sat down before Ronny got sick," she objected.

He nodded gloomily and then looked startled.

"You've remembered something?" Angelica demanded.

It was Johnny's turn to frown. "Yes," he admitted slowly, "but it seems fantastic. Those pictures I took— When I left the hotel last night, that runaway car almost hit me, and this morning someone took a shot at me, when I was driving into town. I was just wondering if—"

"You took a picture of the killer!" Angelica's eyes were round with excitement. "Do you have the film with you?"

He grimly shook his head. She grabbed his shoulder, her face still animated with hope. "Well, where is it?" she demanded. "Maybe I can go and get it for you."

Gloomily, he told her what had happened and her face fell, only to brighten again.

"The murderer won't know that!" she pointed out. "If you went to the police and told them all about it, maybe they could arrange some kind of a plant. Suppose you took another roll of film in for developing, and then they'd wait to see who follows you and tries to get it from the shop!"

"Maybe it would have worked," Johnny admitted hesitantly. "But not now. The murderer couldn't be sure that his picture was taken and he might decide to sit tight—figuring it might be a trap."

"He didn't sit tight this morning," Angelica argued and then looked surprised. "It could have been a woman," she added, as though the thought was shocking.

"It could have been," he agreed, not looking at her.

Her laugh was soft and musical. "Johnny, am I suspect?"

"If you were, you'd never be able to convince me of it."

"Thank you, darling," she told him, her voice warm and almost a caress. "But what are we going to do?"

"What am *I* going to do?" Johnny corrected. "Just let me think a minute."

She drove on silently, while Johnny mused over the situation. She kept her face straight ahead but stole an occasional glance at his moody features.

"You and Harry are both in the clear," he finally announced. "Both of you were seated before Ronny even came near the table —so neither one of you could have known where he was going to sit—and both of you were too far away from where he did sit down. Now, the question is, could

anyone of the junior executives or one of their wives be interested in seeing Ronny out of the way?"

Angelica considered this and wound up shaking her head. "They were all seated, too, when Ronny and Rosalind came to the table—and none of them could have reached across the table without being noticed."

"Actually, that leaves Rosalind a possibility—and Ericson. Did you happen to notice if she sat down before Ronny did—or afterward?"

"I think she sat down before. They were standing together at the table. That's when you took the last picture and I didn't actually watch them sit down. Ericson couldn't have been the one, though. He was in his chair before they came in."

Johnny closed his eyes wearily and tried to reconstruct the way people had filed into the room and been seated.

"Ericson was doing an awful lot of buzzing around, playing the heavy host. It might have been a system, but I can't see how he could have known exactly how it would work out. I was the last one to sit down and Ronny and Rosalind were about the last ones before that—so Ronny had a choice of three chairs."

Angelica suddenly pulled to the curb after crossing a main boulevard. "I just thought of something!" she announced, her voice full of repressed excitement. Opening the door of the coupé, she climbed out and went around back of the car and into a drugstore. When she came back, her face was triumphant and she had a newspaper in her hand.

Hurriedly, she drove on half a block and parked again. Johnny still stared gloomily at the headline on the front page. It read "Actor in Mysterious Death." Angelica turned off the ignition and leaned over to see.

"The police haven't told the papers about the poison angle—not in time to hit this edition, anyway," Johnny observed.

"Pictures on page two!" Angelica said eagerly. "Turn the page!"

He complied in surprise. There were five pictures in all.

"Look!" she said, her voice trembling with agitation, "that clown is in everyone of them!" She stabbed at Ericson with a long lacquered nail. "Don't you see what happened?"

Johnny didn't and told her so.

"Can't you figure it out?" Angelica said impatiently. "He'd do anything to get his picture in the papers. I'll bet that Ronny poisoned himself after you left him in the bedroom, and that clown found the bottle and hid it—just to be sure the publicity wouldn't run down right away!"

"Oh, that's fantastic!" Johnny said, half horrified and half incredulous.

"Not for him!" she protested

emphatically. "He practically drooled all the time you were shooting pictures of him—and he knew they weren't going to be published. Look at the act he's putting on in these!"

Johnny admitted to himself there was the barest possibility that she was right. Ericson was the most dramatic part of every picture, each one obviously posed.

"The trouble is that he's a ham actor at heart!" Angelica said bitterly.

Johnny's heart began to quicken and then the hope went out of him. "The only thing with that theory—and it's a beautiful one," he admitted, "is that it doesn't quite explain why somebody tried to roll a car over me last night—and took a potshot at me this morning."

"Those might have been accidents! Cars are always running down hills—and kids have shot at cars on the highway before!"

The hope welled up in Johnny again. "Honey child," he said, "I think you might have something there. It seems preposterous, but after all—"

"But nothing! Look at the facts. Nobody knew where Ronny was going to sit, so nobody could have poisoned him until after he sat down. You were the only one who could have done it—and you didn't—so nobody did!"

"The dirty—" Johnny began, the thing beginning to take shape in his mind.

"Go ahead," she urged him sweetly, "I'm not listening."

"I'll save it for Ericson!" Johnny said grimly. "It's Saturday—so maybe we can catch him at his hotel. Let's try it."

"Right now!" she happily agreed, stepping on the starter.

Ten minutes later Angelica parked the coupé near the side entrance of the Hotel Royale, on the same hill where the car had run down the night before.

"I'll go up first," she offered, "and see if he's in—and if there are any detectives snooping around. You give me ten minutes and if I'm not back by then, it means we're all set."

It was sound advice and Johnny agreed. She patted his hand, got out of the car and went in by the side entrance. Johnny glanced at his watch and slumped down in the seat to wait. By the time the ten minutes had passed, he'd rubbed the knuckles of each hand into sore lumps. Keeping a wary eye out for possible plainclothesmen, he ducked into the hotel and took the elevator to the penthouse floor.

At Johnny's knock, unhurried footsteps approached the door and the sound of Hugh Ericson's voice came with them. Johnny could not distinguish the words, but the jerky, jocular tone of the voice was unmistakable. The grim lines tightened around his mouth as he waited for the executive to

open the door. His fists had clenched involuntarily but he forced them open as the knob turned.

He had expected Ericson to show surprise, but he was in no way prepared for the other man's violent reaction. With an almost automatic reflex, the advertising man slammed the door in his face. Johnny, having reflexes of his own, got one foot in the way and the door bounced inward again.

By the time he had made it inside and shut the door behind him, Ericson was across the room and had scooped a small automatic from a desk drawer. He stared at Johnny, face pale and the gun quivering in his hand.

"Well!" Johnny said inanely, somewhat at a loss for words.

Angelica was sitting in a chair by the window, her eyes round with alarm and her lips parted. Ericson sidled across to where she sat and reached for the house phone. Johnny took a step forward but stopped under the menacing stare of the gun.

"I'll hold that for you while you phone," Angelica said suddenly, reaching out a small white hand. Her fresh young voice supplied the hint of tremulousness.

Ericson hesitated, his eyes fixed warily on Johnny, and then carefully transferred the gun.

"Be careful," he warned nervously, "it's loaded!"

Angelica, her face pale, dropped it into her purse and laughed. Just as there had been a tremor in her voice, now there was a note of hysteria in her laughter. Ericson stared bewilderedly, his hand on the phone and his jaw sagging.

"Sit down," Johnny told him and came across the room. He pushed the other man into a chair. "What's this nonsense of pulling a gun on me?"

Ericson flinched, as though he expected a blow to follow the question and then squirmed uncomfortably in the chair, his mouth working.

"Advertising executive captures murderous maniac—single-handed!" Angelica suggested.

"I'm not so sure he didn't intend to plug me," Johnny said harshly, glaring down, as the other bounced nervously in the chair. "What's the big idea?" He nudged Ericson's shin with the toe of his shoe.

"The—the police—" Ericson almost whispered, perspiration popping out of every pore.

"Did they call you?"

The advertising man nodded unhappily.

"What did they say?"

Ericson squirmed some more. "Just to keep an eye out for you—and—and let them know."

"Why do you think I'm here?"

All the bounciness drained out of the man. His facial muscles slackened and he stared at Johnny in a daze. Clearly, Ericson was scared out of his wits and it be-

wildered him; even if Angelica was right, surely he'd put up some kind of a bluster. Johnny sat down and glared morosely at his pudgy little host.

"When you pull yourself together, fellow, we'd be interested in what you can tell us about Jeffries' death," he said.

A wave of relief seemed to wash over the advertising man and his face lost its frozen immobility.

"I—I don't know a thing about it, Mr. Cochran—not—not a thing—really. I didn't even know he had been—" he stopped and his mouth trembled with agitation.

"Poisoned," Angelica mentioned matter-of-factly.

Ericson turned and looked at her as though she had cursed, his eyes horrified.

"Now look," Johnny said harshly. "If you have some kind of a screwy idea that I came here to kill you, you can skip it! The cops have me pegged for poisoning our drunken friend last night and I don't happen to be guilty. What I want to know is if by any chance he stepped out by himself. Were you the one who found him?"

Ericson's lips still twitched, but he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his face. His nod was almost eager.

"Yes, I did. I tried to wake him up when I got home and—and he was dead. I phoned downstairs, and the desk called an ambulance and the police. That's all I know. I—I hadn't heard about the p-poison, not until Miss Gilbert broke the news."

"What time did you get home?"

"I—I don't know exactly. It was rather late."

"Where did you find him?"

"On the bed."

Johnny regarded the little man without affection.

"How soon did you leave last night—after we did?" he asked sharply.

"Just a few minutes."

"Where'd you go?"

"The Club Mohada."

"What time did you leave there?"

"About three o'clock, I guess," Ericson said, after a little thought. He appeared to be regaining some of his composure.

"Then where?"

"I took Miss Gordon home."

"Where does she live?"

"On Camelot and Westview. I—I don't know the number. It's a big apartment house—right on the corner."

"What time did you leave there?"

"J-just before daybreak."

Angelica hummed primly and raised her eyebrows. Ericson's face reddened.

"We talked for quite a while," he explained.

"What about?" Johnny wanted to know.

"Darling!" Angelica said reproachfully.

"Did you talk about Jeffries?" Johnny demanded, ignoring her.

Ericson squirmed unhappily. "He entered into the discussion," he admitted.

"Did you quarrel?"

"I don't see—" the advertising man began. His flush had deepened. "What's that got to do with it?"

"I guess it hasn't," Johnny wearily admitted and got to his feet. The frown he gave the girl was worried. "Come on, honey child, let's go. This is no good."

Ericson got to his feet, as they started for the door. Although still agitated, he was almost back to his normal, bouncing nervousness.

"I—I'm sorry about the gun, Cochran," he said jerkily. "I was sort of upset when the officers phoned and said poor Jeffries had been killed. Of course it frightened me when you arrived. I couldn't think of any reason for you coming here, unless—" his voice trailed off. "Of course, your being innocent puts an entirely different complexion on things."

"I appreciate that, old man," Johnny said sardonically.

"If there is something I can do," Ericson offered, "I'll be more than glad—"

"Just don't call the cops until I have a chance to get out of town," Johnny told him.

"Oh, I won't call them at all!" the other earnestly assured him. "If you're innocent, I'll do anything I can to help you. Both of you can count on me," he added, giving Angelica a pleading look.

"That's certainly decent of you," Johnny said dryly. "Just give me an hour's start. I'd rather be chased than be hunted; that way I know where the cops are—behind."

"Oh, yes, of course," the advertising man said vaguely. He seemed puzzled by it all.

They rode the elevator down in silence that lasted until they were back in the coupé. Then she said plaintively, "You're not going to run, are you, Johnny?"

"No," he admitted, "not yet, anyway. I want to see the Gordon girl, but I wanted to throw Ericson off the track if I could."

"You did," Angelica assured him. "Why Rosalind?"

"This business of getting Ronny to sit down in a certain chair. Ericson couldn't have arranged it all by himself, but with her help, it might have worked."

Angelica hummed thoughtfully. "And you think that's why he flipped his lid when you came in?"

"I don't know what to think. Like you say, he might have got rid of any evidence that would point to Ronny's death being a suicide. Also, it's possible that he and Rosalind collaborated in getting Ronny settled in the right chair. But on the other hand, why would either of them want him out of the way? There's none of

it makes any sense. If you take Ericson's jumpy nerves into consideration, you can excuse him for pulling the gun on me. He acted like he thought I'd come to kill him."

"Rosalind might be the key, at that," she mused.

While they were waiting for the traffic lights to change, a newsboy patroled along the white line, jigging a paper in one hand and making unintelligible sounds. The headline shouted, "HUNT TV PRODUCER IN ACTOR'S MYSTERY DEATH."

"You want a paper?"

Johnny shook his head. "The fat is in the fire now. So help me, if Rosalind isn't the key, I'm going to give myself up!"

It was a matter of fifteen minutes before they reached the intersection of Camelot and Westview.

"That's the biggest one," Angelica observed, nodding to a five-story brick apartment house across the corner from them. She steered the coupé to the curb and they walked down to the entrance.

Inside, the corridors were so narrow that the ceiling seemed high in comparison. A letter box said that Miss Gordon's apartment was 503. They embarked in a self-service elevator that might have been an upended coffin. It rose shakily and came to a throbbing, creaking stop; a motor whined and the doors sighed open. They went down the carpeted hallway and Johnny rapped on the door.

Rosalind opened the door without hesitation. A silken, sunlit yellow dressing gown hugged her sleek curves. The red hair framed a face that was devoid of makeup, expression or interest. She stared at them silently, lifted the glass in her hand and very deliberately drank from it.

"Hi!" she said then, her voice thick, and stood aside for them to come in.

When they hesitated after getting inside, she motioned them into chairs.

"Want a drink?" she asked tonelessly.

Angelica shook her head, but Johnny nodded.

"About half a glass of whiskey," he said wearily. "If you can spare it."

"Sure," the redhead said, smiling wryly. "You've got troubles, too?"

"Who hasn't? Maybe they're the same as yours."

That startled her. She looked at him a moment, sat her drink down and went on into the kitchen. She came back carrying two glasses. One was half full of whiskey and the other full of water.

"You took him at his word," Angelica observed.

"I always take people at their word," Rosalind said bitterly. "It's my worst fault."

Johnny let the equivalent of a double shot slide down his

throat. It settled in his empty stomach like a fiery ball. He followed it with half a glass of water.

"We were just talking to your fiancé," he said, when his stomach had quieted down to a warm glow.

"That—!" Rosalind said bitterly. The word she used succeeded in dyeing Angelica's cheeks.

"Aren't you engaged?" Johnny asked carefully.

"We were—right until dawn this morning," the redhead assured him, sneering. "What does he want me to do—sign a release?"

"You know about Ronny?"

"Yes, I know about Ronny," she said wearily, but her lips were tight with emotion. "What do you want? You didn't come here to console me."

"Who poisoned him?"

Rosalind's face had been colorless before and now it turned gray. She stared at Johnny for long seconds, then, without taking her eyes from his, she began to laugh. It was hysteria and Johnny knew it. He lost all hope that she would prove to be of help. Angelica rose, went over to sit on the arm of the redhead's chair and took her hand. Rosalind laid her head against Angelica's arm, stopped laughing and began to cry.

"I could have told them he didn't have a heart," she said at last, and there was anger in her voice. "I don't know why I'm doing this. It doesn't make any difference to me if he died—or somebody killed him. I've considered doing it myself."

"It makes a lot of difference to me," Johnny told her. "The cops think I'm the guy."

She stopped crying and studied him, suddenly interested, as if the notion fascinated her. He realized then that she'd been punishing the whiskey bottle more than he had first suspected.

"Do men poison other men?" she wanted to know, the listlessness back in her voice again. She picked up her glass, drained it and handed it to Angelica.

"Be a good kid," she told her.

"I've been a good kid all my life," Angelica said without rancor, "and I'm still waiting for it to pay off." She took the glass and went into the kitchen.

"If he had poisoned me, I could understand it," Rosalind said, to nobody in particular.

"Who?" Johnny asked her.

"Who?" Her stare was blank again.

"Who do you think might want to poison you?" Johnny explained patiently.

"That—!" she told him. It was the word she'd used before.

"Why would your fiancé want to get rid of you?"

The redhead laughed mirthlessly. "Don't men get tired of women?" she inquired in turn. "Why do you think he wanted Ronald at the party in the first place? Because he hoped we'd get

together again, and I wouldn't be anxious to marry him anymore—that's why. He didn't have the guts to brush me off in any other way."

"But you broke up last night," Johnny pointed out cautiously.

"This morning," she corrected, "but I did the breaking up. After last night, I saw the light. He practically threw me into Ronny's arms!"

Angelica returned with a drink. The redhead accepted it gratefully, and Johnny frowned as she dived into it. Angelica went back to her chair and sat down. In the silence that followed, there was a muffled, crunching sound. Both Johnny and the redhead turned their heads. Angelica blushed under their combined stares and delicately munched the remnants of an ice cube, long lashes veiling her gray eyes.

"Maybe Ericson was trying to poison you, and Ronny got it by mistake," he said, turning back to Rosalind. "Is that what you think might have happened?"

"That—wouldn't poison anybody," she jeered at him. "You're off on the wrong track."

"Do you think Ronny might have done it himself?"

Rosalind shook her head violently. "He wouldn't do that to the world," she said caustically, "no matter how things went. The world needed him—or didn't you know?"

"I suspected it," Johnny admitted. He sipped his drink and blinked at her, uncertainly. "Did Ronny try to proposition you?"

"Nothing permanent," she scoffed. "Nobody wants me permanently." She finished the rest of her drink and added matter-of-factly. "Oh, brother, do I feel sorry for myself!"

"Why didn't Ericson save you a place next to him last night?" Johnny persisted.

"I told you why. He was trying to make an old ember burst into flame again. An old, cold ember."

"Then why didn't you sit next to Ronny?"

Rosalind stared at him and held out her glass to Angelica.

"I'm still a good kid," Angelica assured her and took it, sighing.

"You really think I'd kill him?" Rosalind asked, as though she were trying to get it straight in her mind, and finding the idea a rather fascinating one.

"Did you know his tomato juice cocktail was poisoned?" Johnny kept on patiently. "Did you suspect it?"

"You silly goon, I was in love with him," Rosalind said. She started to cry again, but she took the drink that Angelica carried in from the kitchen.

"So you were in love with him—madly!" Johnny agreed impatiently. "Why didn't you sit next to him? Couldn't you control yourself?"

"Now you're just being mean," the redhead accused mournfully, stopping the tears.

"I'm being desperate! Either I find out who did poison the jerk or I wind up laying a cyanide egg. Can't you get that through your head?"

"You don't care if you humiliate me! You were there yourself. You saw what happened!"

"I was taking pictures," Johnny said hopelessly. "I don't know why you didn't sit next to each other. Was it because my camera case was on the chair?"

"He was mad because I wouldn't leave the party," she said sullenly. "The camera case didn't have anything to do with it. He moved it, anyway."

Johnny stared at her. Then, very deliberately, he finished his drink, looked at Angelica and rose.

"Honey child," he said, and his voice sounded strange to his own ears, "let's you and me get out of here."

He walked across the room, opened the door and waited for her to pass him. She glanced at him anxiously as he closed it. From inside the apartment, the redhead's sobs could still be heard.

He led the way down the carpeted hallway and pressed the button for the elevator.

"Where to, now?" Angelica wanted to know. Her voice was sharp with quick concern.

"I just want to go home," Johnny said wearily.

"The police will be watching your place," she protested, alarmed.

"It doesn't matter now. I've got to go."

"But don't you realize—" She seemed ready to hit him, then she suddenly subsided. "That's what happens when your stomach's empty and you take a drink," she reproached him.

"Honey child, all the whiskey in the world wouldn't make me drunk today," said Johnny, and he added, "I don't want to talk about it anymore. Just take me home."

Angelica's face was pale and frightened, but obediently she drove out of town and turned on the highway toward Johnny's home while he slumped in the seat, eyes closed, face drawn, resting his head against her shoulder. The coupé purred along, dipped through the freeway underpass.

"Thirty-five hundred Santa Clara," Johnny said. He did not bother opening his eyes; his voice was void of all emotion.

When he felt the coupé turn off the road, he sat up and stared out fixedly through the windshield.

"You've been wonderful, honey child," he said.

"I've been trying to help. I'll keep on trying, Johnny."

The Santa Clara street sign hung drunkenly from its post,

oddly at variance with the staid respectability of the elm lined avenue. Angelica glanced anxiously again and again at the sprawling bungalows nestled in landscaped elegance, trying to catch a house number. There were tiny lines of worry drawing and darkening her eyes.

"It's three more blocks," Johnny said.

They passed two intersections and as they approached the third, Angelica jammed on the brakes.

"Look, there's a black sedan in front!"

"Don't worry. That's just Harry's car," he told her with a smile that was almost serene.

She pulled in behind it and started to turn off the ignition, but he caught her hand.

"You run along. I'll see you later," he said gently.

"If you're sure. If that's the way you want it—" She was blinking back her tears.

"That's the way it has to be. And thanks for—"

"Being a good kid!"

He shook his head, clung tightly to her hand. "For being wonderful." He released her hand abruptly, got out of the car and went up the walk. Turning at the door, he waved and went on in.

From there on, his moves were almost like a robot's. He opened the closet door in the hallway and deposited his hat on the top shelf. Stopping in front of the mirror, he brushed at his hair with his hand and went on into the living room. Lois was just coming out into the hallway, the slightest frown marring the gentle beauty of her face, a white gown clinging to her slender body. She gasped.

"So you came back—"

"Hello," he said mechanically.

Harry, glum-faced, was sitting on the couch, smoking. He pressed the cigarette against the bottom of the tray, extinguishing it. He did not seem at all surprised.

"That was a crazy trick to run away this morning," he told Johnny. "Now they're sure you scratched the guy."

"They were already sure," Johnny said dully. He went into the kitchen and pulled an ice tray from the refrigerator. It was hoary with frost and it took effort to press back the handle that freed the ice cubes. The crunching sound brought a warm, glowing image of Angelica into his mind.

He sloshed Scotch into a glass with the ice cubes and added plain water to it. Then he went back into the living room and flopped into his favorite easy chair.

"It's a helluva world," he observed.

Harry stretched out his long legs and rested his head on the back of the couch, his eyes half lidded, moody. Lois walked past him to stand by the fireplace. Her dark eyes were almost black. The white gown made her look virginal.

"You're tight," she said. She lighted a cigarette and her hand trembled.

"Not very," Johnny told her. He looked at the fireplace and wished a fire crackled there. It was empty, cold and dead—like his heart.

"I went ahead and got a lawyer," Harry said. "He's standing by now, at the office. Better call him right away."

"You call him. Tell him to go home. I don't want a lawyer."

"Boy, you *are* stinko," Harry said grimly, and added. "I don't blame you."

"I don't blame you either," Johnny said.

Harry stared at him and shrugged. "You don't have anything to worry about, fellow. I checked the whole thing with this lawyer. He said the evidence wouldn't sustain a conviction—without a confession, that is. You didn't make any admissions this morning, did you?"

"They say flight is an admission. I ran like hell."

"We can explain that. Those two cops would have scared anybody."

"They'll never scare me again."

"Now you're talking!"

"Nothing will ever scare me again, Harry. Do you know why?"

"Go ahead and talk, Johnny, if it'll make you feel any better. You've been under a terrible strain."

"I've been down in the valley of death, watching Justice have a miscarriage."

"Johnny!" Lois exclaimed despairingly. "Harry! Why don't you call that lawyer and have him come right out here. Can't you see he won't be in any condition to discuss anything at all before long?"

"Take it easy, boy," Harry warned him solemnly. "You'll only talk yourself into running again!"

Johnny laughed at them. He let the rest of his drink slide down his throat and coaxed one of the ice cubes into his mouth. Working it into one cheek, he closed his eyes and bit. When the ice crunched, he opened his eyes and smiled. It was a beatific smile, the smile of a child with its first lollipop.

"My God!" cried Lois, horrified. She stood watching the two men as if they both belonged in a monkey cage.

"I promise you I'll never run from anything again," said Johnny. "I don't have to. It's quite obvious to me my life is charmed."

His partner lighted a cigarette, but Lois glared at him and flounced out of the room.

"She has a headache," Johnny said.

Harry scowled moodily. "Could be," he shrugged.

"I always thought she had a lot of headaches. Now I know it's

just been one. Have I been giving you one, too, Harry?"

"You're giving me one now."

"I can't believe I ever gave you one before. I can see where it must've been Lois and you right along, but you didn't begrudge me my half of the partnership, did you?"

"No," said Harry, his face sharply drawing together and his eyes alert.

"It wouldn't be like you," Johnny mused. "You're a gloomy sort of guy, but you were never worried about money very much. I was the one who drove us up into the big time bracket, and you went along like a good sport. I'd just as soon have worked less, and had less too, Harry. I did it all for Lois. Do you believe that?"

"If you say so."

"You'd have found it out yourself—if things had just worked out the way you planned," Johnny told him. "Anyway, I blame Lois more than I do you."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about, you know," Harry reminded him.

"Oh, sure you do. You're sitting tight, and I can't blame you for that either. I'd like to talk about it though. I feel so rotten, I've just got to talk about it."

"You have the floor."

"Okay. You wanted Lois, and she couldn't see giving up half of the business—or maybe she was afraid I'd wreck it, out of spite. She brought the poison to the party, just a pinch of sodium cyanide she'd filched from my darkroom supply. But then she lost her nerve and passed it on to you. Maybe you would have argued with her, but you had Ronny on your hands, so you couldn't. She'd already explained it to you, how easy it would be—and how safe, the way people left their drinks sitting around. The trouble was I didn't get there soon enough to have a drink before dinner. Are you listening?"

Harry had turned toward the hallway. He raised his hand slowly, palm outward. "I'm listening," he said, almost gently.

"We were standing right by the folding doors, when Ericson slid them back, and we were the first two into the dining room. The candles were lighted on the table, but I wanted to take some pictures, and there wasn't enough light. There was a light switch next to the door leading from that room to the hotel corridor, so I hung my camera case on the back of a chair and went across the room to turn on the light. Ericson went ahead and called in the other guests, and you thought of Lois. I'd rather believe Lois was on your mind right then, instead of the partnership. Do you mind?"

"I don't mind," Harry said softly.

"So then you went ahead and poisoned the tomato juice, at the place where I'd hung my camera case. People started coming in and

I was taking pictures. Ericson wanted you to sit by him, and so you went around the table. Ronny and Rosalind had come in late. I don't know whether or not you saw Ronny move the camera case; if you did, you sat and thought it over. You were always one to take your time, but your decisions were usually better than mine."

"It sounds like a pipe dream," Harry said slowly. "You're not serious, are you?"

"Kind of. You're taking your time now, Harry. You don't want to make any wrong answers until you've turned the whole thing over in that gloomy head of yours. Let me point this out, though. The cops did a pretty good job of analyzing our little dinner party last night. They made one slip, because they didn't know about the camera case. When they hear about that, and about the runaway car on the hill—and they've already started wondering about the bullet hole in my windshield that my loving wife put there this morning, or I miss my guess—things are going to look different. Do you agree?"

"It's possible," Harry admitted, frowning.

"You know they will. Their entire theory is based on the idea that nobody could have poisoned Ronny until they knew where he was going to sit. The way things worked out—except for me—he was the last one to sit down. That's Ronny's case, but mine was different. I left a flag on my chair."

"Don't, Lois," said his partner gently. "I want to think about it."

He was looking toward the hallway again. Johnny turned and looked too. He grinned when Lois came into the room and sat down next to Harry. Her face was pale and defiant, and she looked very beautiful. In her hand was a pistol, a long-barreled .22 Colt he'd bought five years ago, when they'd gone camping in the Sierras, on their honeymoon.

"You better let her have her way, Harry," Johnny said bitterly. "She'll get one of her headaches if she doesn't. She'll be sweet about it, though. Lois is a martyr about headaches, but she suffers so silently and so terribly that you've got to give in to her sooner or later."

Lois raised the gun and aimed it squarely right between his eyes. Harry got up and stepped between them, quickly. "No!" he said. "Not yet—"

"For awhile, I thought I might have taken a picture of the murderer," Johnny went on, flinching from the dark intensity of Lois' eyes, "but that didn't make sense. I could have taken his picture, because he had to wait until Ronny sat down—and everybody else had sat down by then. But I'll bet you I did get a picture of Ronny moving my camera case. That's why you tried to get me afterwards with that free wheeling car.

It missed, so you phoned Lois the bad news. You were probably scared by that time, but not my devoted wife. She knew I had ruined the film, but she got up early and made like a juvenile delinquent on the freeway bridge. She's strong-willed, Harry—or have you found that out?"

Lois' hand was gripping the gun so tightly that her knuckles stood out white, and the long barrel quivered as though it had the ague.

"Do it!" she whispered fiercely, trying to force the gun into Harry's hand. "Shoot him now! Can't you see it's the only way out?"

Johnny closed his eyes and his mouth twisted in pain. There was a tiny clunk of steel on wood. When he forced himself to look, his partner had taken the gun from his wife and laid it on the mantel above the fireplace, and was coming across the room, his long arms hanging limp, and his face set and purposeful.

"Okay," said Johnny, grinning crookedly. "We'll see if that old axiom of might and right is worth the paper it's been taking up all these years!" He flung his empty glass at Harry's face and lunged out of the chair.

The glass missed and shattered against the wall. He drove his fists past Harry's upraised arms and opened a cut that ran the length of one eyebrow. The cut welled crimson and a stream of blood ran from its lowest point. Harry stepped back and Johnny circled him.

"I thought you learned to box in college," Johnny sneered at him and charged in again. This time a trickle of blood left a crooked trail down his partner's lower lip.

Harry's big fists slammed into Johnny's chest above the heart, and sucked strength from Johnny's arms.

"That's more like it," Johnny acknowledged, gasping with pain that caused a red haze in front of his eyes. Those fists had driven in easily and deliberately. The big man was playing with him and Johnny knew it. He beat a wicked tattoo on his partner's face with all the strength that was left in his arms, and Harry made no effort to ward off the blows. Then came another of those crushing fists to the heart that paralyzed his muscles and turned his legs into soft rubber. Johnny was not conscious of falling, but the rug's coarse nap bristled against his cheek. He tried hard to get up, but a vast lethargy had seized his body.

"Bring me the gun," Harry said calmly.

Johnny wanted to laugh, but there was too much agony in his body. Harry had asked for those blows to the face, and he'd carefully failed to return them—and Johnny knew why.

Lois had retreated to the hall, but now she stumbled back into the room and made for the fire-

place. Harry waited, his legs straddled wide, his breathing hoarse.

"He came home drunk—crazy drunk," he said tonelessly, spacing the words for emphasis. "He told us about poisoning Jeffries, and accused us of being in love with each other. We tried to reason with him, but he said he was going to kill us both and then do away with himself. I fought with him, trying to get the gun—and it went off. Now do you understand?"

"We all understand," a pleasant voice said from the hallway.

Lois gasped and turned, the gun still in her hand. Lieutenant Haynes was standing there, his boyish smile contrasting with the touseled white hair. Sergeant King was at his right, and behind them, Johnny could see Angelica's frightened face.

Lois raised her hand, and a little whipping report came from the target pistol. A surprised grunt escaped the lieutenant's lips and he turned slightly, his face twisting with pain. At the same time, a snub-nosed revolver barked savagely in the stocky sergeant's hand and Lois settled to the floor with a strange, silent awkwardness. Harry looked down at her, then went over to the couch and sat down, his head hunched forward, staring at the bloodspattered toes of his shoes.

Johnny tried to get up, but the room swayed in and out of focus.

"Where'd she get you, Chief?" Sergeant King asked Haynes anxiously.

"Right here," the lieutenant said, surprised incredulity in his voice, probing his shoulder with a fingertip.

"You better sit down," the sergeant said worriedly.

Haynes sat down carefully, his face pale. Johnny got to his feet and staggered toward the door.

"Where you going?" King wanted to know.

"Outside."

"No you don't. You stay in here."

"Let him go," the lieutenant said softly.

Johnny reeled out through the open front door and sat down on the porch steps. After a minute, Angelica came out and sat beside him. She was crying.

"You shouldn't have come back," Johnny told her.

"They stopped me. They were watching the house."

"It's a helluva mess," Johnny said. He sat there in the warm sunshine, his hand shielding his eyes, shivering.

witness for the defence

by . . . Frank O'Rourke

Rayburn was stubborn. It took two different girls to teach him a man must forget pride to keep it.

RAYBURN came through the patio to the desk, tossed his key to the room clerk and walked across the quiet lobby to the dining room. He was wearing brown slacks, a green gabardine sports shirt and—comically visible as his pants legs rose and fell—two different colored socks, as if his room light had failed him in the dark grogginess of waking and dressing. He was a big man with uncombed black hair falling over a tanned face, and his eyes and the drawn, sullen mouth were edged and touched with shadows.

He entered the dining room and moved to his small table on the left side, where he had a panoramic view of the beach and gulf and clear blue sky. Counting three other late risers, two elderly women in dark blue and a small, fidgeting boy between them, not enough to make the usual humming quorum, he grinned wryly in appreciation of the welcome silence. His waitress, the small girl with quiet eyes smiling from her serious face, waited while Rayburn consulted a menu he knew by heart.

Frank O'Rourke, well known for his sports stories and stories of the Old West in the Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, etc., makes a first appearance in these pages with this unusual account, admittedly not a detective story, of a man who allows himself to be railroaded because his pride is hurt.

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"Large glass of tomato juice," he said, "and black coffee." He opened the morning paper folded neatly beside his plate. Compliments of the management, he thought, always thinking of your comfort. He stared stonily at the headlines and turned to the sports page.

"Is that all, Mr. Rayburn?" the waitress asked hopefully. As usual, ever since the third or fourth day of his arrival, she was watching him, her large eyes touched with worry.

"Yes," Rayburn said, "and hurry, please."

"Yes, sir," she said softly, and hurried away.

Rayburn lit a cigarette, striking the match on his fingers and getting sulphur under his thumbnail; his fingers trembled and he knew the drinking was getting him down. But it helped a man forget for a few hours and that was worth paying the piper. It seemed that getting tight was the only cure; then only could he forget. Every night he drank until the bar closed, then went out on the beach and looked at the water and the sky, the stars and moon grinning down owlishly at him, and in this sleeping silence he could feel confidence and new strength. It was like finding a second mother who came to him when he was in need and struck out his rage and anger and shame, giving him back, in the hours of drunkenness, something of the decency and happiness he had possessed before.

His waitress was back with the tomato juice and black coffee, and he swallowed the juice in one long gulp. He sipped the coffee, added a spoonful of sugar, and tried another mouthful; it tasted better and he knew he was all right if he could enjoy sugar in his coffee. He felt better and looked up with some humor in his face, then lost it immediately when he saw Joyce, as surprised as himself, standing beside his table, the quick morning smile on her face fading into abrupt whiteness. She was wearing a dark red half coat over a foolish looking green dress that made her even more beautiful than he had remembered.

Rayburn said, "Hello, Joyce," for lack of better words.

She said, "What are you doing here, Tom?"

Then Rayburn noticed the man behind her, a bright-eyed young major, small and very handsome in a thin, dark way. Looking at the uniform hurt Rayburn's eyes and made him sick with the old, ashamed longing. He said, "Catching up on my drinking," feeling, as he spoke, the old pull her presence always gave him. He had loved her for so long that seeing her again, even when it was all over between them, gave him that same throttled chokiness in his chest.

"Well," Joyce said, "I thought you were farther than this."

Rayburn was sorry and angry in the same moment. He said, "Sorry," and bent over his coffee, although not before noting the quick spurt of hot blood flooding her face. He tried to think of something decent but the words wouldn't come.

"Yes," she said, "this is quite a coincidence. Twenty towns and a hundred hotels and we pick the same one. Well, I hope you're enjoying yourself, Tom."

"Thank you," Rayburn said. "I am."

She turned away, her hand on the major's arm, and he watched them move to a large table where they were joined by three other couples, their light laughter grating on his nerves. They talked animatedly and pointed through the window at the sun and the white-hulled boats scattered like cotton bolls on the smooth green water.

Rayburn wondered how she had found the major in two weeks and decided she hadn't wasted any time after what had happened. He knew she was hurt deeply and had every right to hate him, but he still could not understand why she had treated him as completely guilty without giving him a chance to explain. But that was his fault in a sense, and he knew it.

There was no use going back and rehashing what was done and finished. He already had an overclear picture of the investigation and his own amazed surprise at their pinning the guilt on him. They had assigned him a former lawyer, Major Wiliams, as his defense counsel, and at first Rayburn had treated the entire affair as absurd and foolish. But then, the slow, angry realization as he talked with Williams, outlining his defense, that Williams actually believed he was guilty, smashed him with brutal revulsion. He knew he was a fool for not getting up on his hind legs and proving his innocence—a bigger fool for not calling his own lawyer in town, but this unexpected and wholehearted belief by all concerned that he was guilty brought his Irish stubbornness and hot blood boiling to the top. So he had lain down, deliberately, stunned and angered until he didn't care what happened, and let them push the case through with the evidence piling up more than the necessary points for conviction. Even Major Williams could do nothing without his help. Williams gave up early in the trial; he knew when he was licked.

And then the last minute of the court-martial with his commanding general coughing sanctimoniously, and reading a lot of words that ran together in a meaningless jumble but finally came out cold and hard, stating that Captain Thomas Rayburn

was dishonorably discharged from the Army for reasons set forth in the above statement. Rayburn had stood before the general, nursing a dull passive apathy, yet raging inwardly that they would doubt his sworn word of innocence. His word had never been doubted before and, while he knew that all he had to do was show them his bank book to straighten things out, some pugnacious resistance and stubborn pride sealed his mouth.

When they read the sentence he had pulled out his wallet, placed five one-hundred-dollar bills on the desk, and said bitterly, "Thank you, gentlemen, for a most interesting drumhead. Here is the money I am supposed to have stolen, with a little interest for your cigars. Now, as I am no longer in the armed services and not under your jurisdiction, you may all go to hell with my blessing." And turning, he had marched from the building, seeing nothing and hearing nothing in his rage at their blindness.

He had driven to his quarters, packed his bags, changed into civilian clothes, then driven around to battalion headquarters and walked into the office. Captain Fisher was standing with his back to the door, talking with the colonel, and he tapped Fisher on the shoulder and said, "Right now, Fisher." When the man turned, his face paling suddenly, he hit Fisher the most satisfying blow of his life. He hit him again as Fisher went down, then gave the colonel a sardonic, half comic salute, and walked out of the building and out of their lives.

He had stopped halfway to town and called Joyce after that, and had heard her voice answer, cool and unconcerned.

He said, "I'm a civilian now. I thought you'd like to know."

"I see," Joyce said, and he caught the sudden change in her voice. "They discharged you?"

"Dishonorably," he said tightly. "You want me to come in and tell you about it? I'd like to talk with someone I can trust. I think I've made a mistake."

Her voice was cold and very distinct: "I don't think it's necessary, Tom."

"Oh," he said, understanding then. But he was losing the last shred of his rapidly vanishing calmness and he slashed out at her bluntly: "Don't you want to get the straight of this?"

"Why?" she said. "I have the straight of it, haven't I?"

"So you believe the court-martial," he said bitterly. "All right, Joyce, if that's how you want it."

"If you'll give me your future address," Joyce said, "I'll send your ring."

"Throw it in the river," Rayburn said savagely, and slammed the phone on the hook.

He had driven on through the town and headed south for Flor-

ida to the resort hotel he had frequented before the war. It was a fine finish for a man who had given his country two years overseas, part of his health and all of his ability. His girl gone and a nice yellow can tied to his tail. The injustice of it hit him then, and a reluctant realization of his own foolish pride, but he was too mad to think straight, and he was still half stunned by the fact that they had convicted him for something he didn't do. . . .

Rayburn went back to his cabana and changed into swimming trunks, took a long drink from the rum bottle and walked behind the game house to a strip of quiet beach far from the lounging chairs and parasols. where a man could lie down and think his thoughts out in silence.

He almost stepped on the girl lying full length in the sand, and when he recovered his balance she looked up and smiled. He recognized his little waitress, wearing a simple black bathing suit, her hair, now free of the white uniform cap, thick and tawny about her shoulders.

She said, "Oh, Mr. Rayburn. If you want to be alone, I'll move up on the beach."

It was her quiet voice and the gentle politeness she offered that made him swallow his curt words. He saw her as a girl then, not as a robot that carried plates and took orders. She was younger than he supposed and her face was not so much plain as it was regular and strong.

He said, "No, no, that's all right," and then, trying to be decent: "Why should you move away? You were here first and I won't bite."

She sat up and pulled her hands through her hair. "Well, you looked so worried and tired and you don't eat enough, Mr. Rayburn. I thought you wanted to be alone. You always are, you know."

He was surprised that she was so considerate; it made a difference to him in his present mood. He sat down beside her and offered a cigarette, and she accepted it and the light. "So I look worried?" he said, fishing for conversation. "What do you think I should do about it?"

"If you'll pardon me," she said quietly, "I think you have been drinking too much."

"That's my business," Rayburn said sharply, and then was ashamed of his anger. He looked at her again. She was different out here in the strong warm sunlight, and her voice was better, as though she were talking in the way she wanted to. "Sorry," he said. "I'm a little grouchy. Maybe I have been hitting it too hard."

She smiled and cradled her chin on her knees, staring out over the water. Rayburn heard voices coming toward them and saw Joyce and the major, wearing bathing suits running along

the water's edge. Rayburn caught the angry flash of Joyce's eyes as she saw the girl beside him, but then she turned to the major, trotting like a puppy beside her, and they went on up the beach.

The girl raised her head. "You know her, don't you?" she asked.

"Did is the word," Rayburn said. "You've got sharp eyes."

"I noticed her in the dining room during your breakfast," she said. "You like her a lot. I think."

"I'll be damned," Rayburn said. "Is there anything you don't know about me?"

She gave him a level stare. "Why, yes, Mr. Rayburn. Whatever it is that makes you look like a sad bulldog and wear that perpetual hangover? You aren't supposed to be like that here." She laughed and he found joy in her voice and eyes. "You give the place a bad look. You're supposed to be happy and have a good time."

Then he had to tell someone or blow up inside. He said, "Suppose I tell you a story. Would that stop you from playing doctor?"

"You do want to talk, don't you?" she said. "You're all full of words and you want to tell someone and I'm handy. Good. I'm glad I am. By the way, I've been waiting on you for two weeks. My name is Nancy Warren."

"My name—you know my name," Rayburn said. "Call me Tom, as long as we're being democratic."

"No," she said firmly. "I don't think I'd better. After all, you are a guest here and I'm a waitress."

Rayburn liked her for that. He threw his cigarette away, looked up the beach where the two figures were now small black dots against the white sand, and started talking. It was a relief to get everything out, put the bitter and sweet and unjust in a neat pile of words, tell it all and lean back, empty and relaxed.

He waited for her to get up and go away, but she rubbed her toes absently and frowned.

"You didn't take the money?" she said. "And you didn't do anything to defend yourself?"

"I was too mad," Rayburn said. "Oh, I had some ideas but the more stuff they threw at me, the madder I got. It was all so crazy and unbelievable, I just sat there and listened, told them what I thought at the end, and walked out."

"I think that's foolish," Nancy said. "I wouldn't let anyone railroad me because my pride was hurt. I'd—I'd fight 'em to a frazzle."

He grinned down at her determined face. She was a funny little thing, no bigger than a half pint, but full of fire and vinegar when you got to know her. He wondered what she was doing

waiting on tables in this place; not that it wasn't a decent job, but she seemed to have something else in her.

"And how would you have fought 'em?" Rayburn asked.

"My Lord!" she said suddenly. "That's your business. Haven't you a lawyer or friends?"

"I had," Rayburn chuckled, remembering the exodus. "Dozens of them, I *had*."

"Fair weather friends," she said shortly. "Real friends would show up if you needed them. Don't you have one?"

"Well, yes," Rayburn said, remembering Brown. "I just didn't think about him."

She looked down at the white sand and then up at him, and her nose wrinkled and ironed out with some deep thought. "Well," she said, "you were certainly a fool in one way, and in another maybe not so much. Of course, if you used your head you would not lose that girl—" They looked up the beach where the black figures were growing larger.

"Sure," Rayburn said. "Tell me that now." He laughed harshly. "We're all washed up."

"I don't know," Nancy said. "I saw her eyes when she passed us and she glared a hole right through me."

"Well," Rayburn said, "they are heading back and I don't want to see her again. Let's take a swim and I'll buy you a drink."

She pushed her hair back and got up. "I'll accept the swim but not the drink. It's against the rules for employees to associate with guests."

"All right," Rayburn said. "Will you swim with me tomorrow?"

"If I have time," she said. "And look, don't drink so much, please. It isn't good for you."

"Sure," Rayburn said, knowing he wouldn't remember later on. The figures were bigger now and he said, "Let's go," and ran toward the water.

He showered and shaved and had two long drinks before he dressed and went to dinner. Nancy waited on him, smiling her friendly greeting. He remembered what she had said about eating more and ordered a large dinner, finishing with apple pie à la mode. He left just as Joyce and the major entered, and then he felt bad inside, as if the food had turned to cement. Joyce could do that to him, no matter where he was, no matter how many years passed.

He went into the bar and played checkers for a while with Patterson, a wrinkled centenarian who inhabited the corner table sixteen hours a day. After he lost the rubber game, he paid for their drinks, considered a few more, then decided on a walk before he settled down to some late evening elbow bending.

He said good night to Patterson and went outside and stood

in the grass, blinking groggily into the setting sun and smelling the salt air coming from the dark green water. Then everything came back into clear focus, the hotel, the people, the voices about him. He could hear the rhythmic pounding of the waves on the sand, the moan of wind rising through the palms, and his watch said ten o'clock and meant exactly nothing. He turned away toward the lights of the hotel and saw Joyce and the major come from the patio entrance. Just seeing the maple leaves and insignia on the major's collar gave him that sharp tearing pain in his chest again, and veering away, he headed for his cabana.

He remembered then what Nancy had said about proving his innocence, and the thought was lucid and good tonight. He had loved Joyce too long to give up so easily, and seeing her like this brought back all the old longing with a rush. He went into his cabana and on a sudden impulse picked up the phone.

Calling long distance, he told the operator to find Jim Brown, the lawyer in the city near the fort, a man he had met two years before and liked very much. He got Brown after an hour, during which he had five drinks, just enough to make him sullen again and completely angry at the world.

When Brown answered, he talked for an hour, telling Brown what he should have told him three weeks ago. Indifferent at first, Brown became greatly excited, asked a question now and then, and finally shouted, "Is this straight stuff, Rayburn?"

"The only way I can figure it," Rayburn said thickly. "If you mean, did I take the money, hell, no. You know better than that. You did my income tax last year. You know what I'm worth."

"You damned fool," Brown said. "Why didn't you tell them the facts? Why didn't you tell me two weeks ago?"

"Never mind," Rayburn said. "Get to work. You could do it in a day if you hit him fast."

"Are you drunk?" Brown asked suddenly.

"I am," Rayburn said, "and I had to get drunk to call you."

Brown's voice was excited. "Listen," he said, "I believe you, Rayburn. By God, I do believe you, but, damn it all, why didn't you come to me at once? I'll start on it at once, not tomorrow. This is too urgent to waste time sleeping. I'll call you as soon as things shape up."

"Good," Rayburn said, suddenly feeling tired and foolish. "Good night."

He hung up and reached for the bottle; he was tired and groggy and didn't care much what happened as long as he could show Joyce the truth. He thought of her again and smiled at the bottle. . . .

There was a burning in Rayburn's eyes when he woke, a burning that extended from the middle of his nose to the back of his head. Light was pouring thick and yellow-bright, through the Venetian blind and he got out of bed to close it, his fingers fumbling with the cords; the battens stuck and he swore once, jerked savagely and they flopped down. The room was immediately dark and cooler and much easier on his smarting eyes.

He sat down on the bed and groped for his shoes, then remembered it was morning and he needed a bath, maybe a short drink and then a swim. He looked at the bottle; it was empty. He groaned and walked unsteadily into the bathroom. His head was swelling now, bigger and bigger, like a kid blowing a red balloon too tight at a circus, bigger and bigger and then—pop!—and nothing. The cold water stung his shoulders and face and he sat down weakly on the edge of the tub, gasping for breath, feeling the needle darts of cold water shock him awake, shivering and half sick to his stomach.

He was ashamed of himself then and wished someone would tell him what a fool he was. He thought of the sergeant he had known, the man who could stand up before a platoon and, in a flat voice like someone beating a fly swatter against a stone wall, evoke such horrible pictures of what would happen to them if they didn't pass inspection that you could see their hides blister visibly. He needed the sergeant to give him a good eating out, or the girl, Nancy, to talk softly and make him feel ashamed. Then he remembered Nancy and his promise to go swimming, and glanced at his watch. It was almost noon. He dried off, shaved, dressed quickly and hurried over to eat.

Nancy had already gone swimming and Rayburn bolted tomato juice and black coffee, went back and changed into his trunks, then walked behind the game house to the beach. She was in the same spot, a towel over her eyes, lying on her shoulders and paddling her feet. He sat down beside her.

"Exercise?" he asked cheerfully, and she stopped and pulled the towel away and grinned at him.

"My legs," she said. "They gain weight on me when I'm not looking. You look better this morning."

"I don't see how," Rayburn said. "I feel terrible."

"But you did something, didn't you?" she asked. "I can tell."

"Yes," he said, and told her about his call.

She listened solemnly and nodded her approval. "You should have done that long ago," she said. "Now you'll see what a darned fool you were to be so stubborn and reticent."

Her soothing connotations were nice to hear. Rayburn said, "Look, you're not really a waitress, are you?"

She laughed. "No, although I try to be a good one. My brother is stationed near here at an airfield and he's about to go over. We're pretty good pals so I came down here to be with him these last three months before he goes. I couldn't find anything else to do—there are a dozen wives for every job—so I took this. It's really fun in a way."

And then they were lying on their backs and she was telling him about herself and her brother being alone since their parents' death ten years before in an accident. And how she had finished college and helped him on through until he was drafted. She had been secretary to the president of a large engineering company in the Middle West, and when her brother was alerted, her boss gave her a three-months leave of absence and she came down at once. "You know how it is," she said, "I hadn't saved very much because Dick had been quite an expense, so this job was almost a necessity."

He didn't answer, and she sat up and looked over at him, and said, "You've taken a bad beating, haven't you?"

Rayburn nodded, thinking about Joyce and wondering if Brown was getting any action up north. He sat up and stared at the gulf, and the girl watched him, her eyes clouding over.

"Look," she said suddenly, "I don't know how to say this, but if you need some money, if that's the trouble, I could help you a little."

Rayburn turned and stared at her. "You want to loan me some money?"

"Not very much," she said apologetically. "A hundred or two but you're welcome to it."

"Why?" Rayburn asked. "You don't know me, Nancy. How do you know I won't take it and skip?"

"I know you won't," she said. "I trust you."

Rayburn said, "I'll be damned," and wanted to put his hand on her shoulder, to feel her smallness and great courage, so that some of it might flow into him and rekindle part of the belief he had known before. He felt very humble, sitting beside her, getting so much from her words. He said, "Thanks, Nancy, thanks a lot, but I don't need it. Look, you've been good to me and told me about yourself. Let me tell you about the things I did before."

He told her about his home and school and going out on his own, in Mexico, and how he had made his money in various ways; and how, as these things built up through the years, he gained a reputation for honesty and truthfulness in his business that be-

came a sincere part of his life, so that being confronted with something like the court-martial accusation, he was so mad he refused to say a word in his own behalf.

He finished and, looking around, saw that her face was very close, and knew that she had bent toward him unconsciously, listening to him speak. He smiled and poked her in the nose and she grinned back and straightened up. He didn't know why he did it but he reached over and pulled her against him and kissed her gently. It didn't last long for she sat up and looked at him, her mouth trembling a little.

Rayburn said, "Please, I'm sorry, but I just couldn't help it. You've been so damned nice."

"I know," she said. "I know how you feel. But don't do it again. Sometimes other people don't understand how a person reacts to a thing like this."

"You're not angry?" he asked.

"No, just glad that you feel so good. You'll have her back in a few days and I hope she's worth it. Well, I've got to go."

"Look," Rayburn said, "will I see you again?"

"I don't know," she said, suddenly quiet and sober. "I'm going over to the field for the week end and stay with Dick. He leaves soon after that. I'll be going home then."

"But—" Rayburn said.

She got up and pushed her hair back in that funny little way she had, and before he could thank her, she ran swiftly down the beach and into the ladies' locker room.

Rayburn frowned and started for his cabana, and a boy came from the lobby and said, "Telephone, sir. It's long distance and important."

Rayburn crossed the shuffleboard court to his cabana and picked up the phone. He said, "Brown?"

Brown's voice came to him, clear and strong and extremely excited: "That you, Tom?"

"Yes," Rayburn said. "What about it?"

Brown said, "Rayburn, you were right—I just laid the evidence before your colonel. I showed him your bank book—it's just over thirty thousand now—and what I discovered. Brother, it was like shooting fish in a rain barrel. This Fisher sent his brother a money order for four hundred and seventy-five dollars the morning after the battalion fund was stolen. He didn't send it from here, but I covered every town within thirty miles and got the dope from the postmaster in a little dump down the line. The postmaster identified his picture and is with me now. I also checked Fisher's bank account for one year back and he never had over a hundred bucks in it. Then I checked up on his movements

that night and the next morning, and he was gone all right, just like you said he was, until almost noon, when he returned from town with some good excuse."

"What else?"

"We had quite a little court-room scene," Brown chuckled. "Your colonel turned about ten different colors when I showed him just what you were worth. Then he called this Fisher in and laid it on the line, and Fisher got white as a sheet in nothing flat. He tried to pan off the dough as his winnings in a crap game, and then this colonel called in every officer in the regiment while we sat there, and not a single one had shot craps a week before or after the robbery."

"It was the last of the month," Rayburn said. "They were all broke by then."

"Of course," Brown said. "It was a feeble excuse. The colonel showed Fisher your bank account and got up and let loose with some of the choicest language I have ever heard in my born days, about you and what a fool Fisher was to pin it on you, just because you were in charge of the fund. Then Fisher just wilted and sat down and mopped his face, and all at once it came out. It was the prettiest piece of surprise attack I ever witnessed. That colonel sure missed his calling. He should have been a lawyer."

"So—?" Rayburn said, feeling himself tremble.

"So come on back," Brown shouted into the phone. "At once. They're warming up a fresh court-martial and calling Washington for your records and changing them and hanging out an arch to welcome you home. Listen, Tom, you're partly to blame and I hope this taught you a lesson, but the colonel told me to tell you that he's a damned fool and you're a stubborn jackass and he has a couple of maple leaves almost ready for you. When can you start?"

Rayburn said, "In a couple of days, maybe sooner. And, Brown—"

"Yes, yes, what is it?"

"Thanks, Brown, thanks," and his throat choked up and words were difficult.

He started for the door and remembered he hadn't changed clothes. Then he laughed, good and clean and free, and grinned down at the fresh bottle on the table. He picked it up and dropped it into the wastebasket. He wanted to find Joyce and tell her what she didn't know and watch her face; and in the same moment he thought of Nancy and how pleased she would be.

He changed clothes rapidly and went out of the cabana with his shirt half unbuttoned. The gulf was dark blue and a few clouds were scudding overhead. He came around the corner by the patio and almost bumped into the major.

"Sorry," the major said. "Oh, Mr. Rayburn."

The major was holding some bottles and a bowl of chipped ice. "You look lonely," the major said. "Why don't you have a drink with us? Joyce knows you —been telling me about you. Come on over to the game room. We got a big crowd over there."

The man was kidding him, Rayburn knew, and then he saw Joyce coming toward them. She was carrying a glass and she was half on the way to a good glow. She said, "Oh!" and stopped.

The major grinned and said, "I was just asking *Mr.* Rayburn over for a drink, Joyce. He looked so lonesome—"

"*Captain* Rayburn probably doesn't want to drink with us," Joyce said, and laughed at Rayburn, her eyes wide and vacant.

"Thanks," Rayburn said, not liking their talk, feeling his happiness curdle in him. He felt something coming and he hadn't planned it this way, but he could not do a thing to stop it.

"Come, come," Joyce said lightly. "Guilt needn't hang heavy on your head."

"I was just going to tell you something," Rayburn said. "I—"

"Oh, about that little girl," Joyce laughed. "A waitress, too, of all things. You have beautiful taste, Tommy."

And then Rayburn felt it coming and he knew it was true and part of his joy turned to ashes in his mouth, the way anything that seemed good would do when you found it false. He remembered his father talking to him one day, while they rested during a hard afternoon's hunting, saying, "Tom, women are foolers. Just one hole in their stocking and you see them square away and love takes a runout." And looking at her and seeing the hole, not in her stocking but in her whole self, he knew how smart the old man had really been.

He laughed. "Yes, a waitress, Joyce. Much better than the last one."

The major swung around and said, "What do you mean, *Mr.* Rayburn? Joyce, is he insulting you?"

She flung her head back, her eyes hot and angry.

"In a sense, Bill," she said. "He's good at it. He made me a laughingstock three weeks ago."

The major thrust the bottles into her hands and moved toward Rayburn. He said, "I think you'd better apologize to Joyce, *Mr.* Rayburn."

The anger was rising in Rayburn now. He said, "Apologize to her, Major? Not on your life. She should apologize to me."

"It's a good thing I found out about you before it was too late," Joyce said suddenly.

"No," Rayburn said gently, "it is the other way, Joyce. It's a

good thing I found out what a narrow-minded, sanctimonious little fool you are. Made you a laughingstock, did I? Lady, just wait, just wait."

"Now look here," the major said, with great dignity. "You can't talk to Joyce like that."

"Shut up!" Rayburn said curtly. "You're playing out of your league, Major. And no rough stuff with that uniform on. You wouldn't want to go through a nice little lawsuit for assaulting a civilian, would you? And I might add, for your benefit, that you might not be able to appear before a court for a long time if you get any strong ideas." His voice went up a notch, harsh and slapping. "Joyce, you might read the evening paper, just for laughs."

He looked at Joyce and grinned and walked away from her, down the walk toward the hotel. He felt good and his brain seemed fresh and swept clean of all cobwebs. It had hit him all at once—the fact that she hadn't been worth the torture and pain and long hours of thinking about her. When he thought back and realized how close he had been to telling her, he thanked the little major with all his heart for his unconscious assistance. But his anger was hot and bright against her, urging him to do something else, something good and decent, and then he'd had it.

He went straight through the lobby into the dining room and looked for Nancy. She was bending over a fat lady at the center table, and he walked over and took the tray from her hands and set it on the other side of the table, hard.

Nancy looked up surprised, then wondering, for he knew she had thought he was drunk. She said, "Tom, please!"

Rayburn took her hands and turned her around. "Look," he said, putting words together slowly. "Let's go see your brother tonight. Do you understand?"

"You mean—?" Nancy asked.

"Lady," Rayburn said, "we've got to figure out a lot of things and let's not waste a moment."

She looked at him, her eyes on his face. Rayburn saw the feeling spreading unchecked now, like a fine glow, coming straight from her heart, a glow like a widening ripple that was warm and reached out from her to him. Rayburn took the white cap from her head and turned her toward the door.

The fat lady said peevishly, "My good girl, serve my dinner!"

Rayburn turned and snapped his fingers under her nose.

"Madam," he said happily, "serve your own blasted dinner. You've got enough there for three people anyway."

chequemate

by . . . Bruce Graeme

Blackshirt, equally at home in high society and in the underworld, never resisted problems like Norma Waley.

IT WAS raining not only cats and dogs, but cows, horses and elephants as well.

The rain came down not in drops, but in bucketfuls, and there were so many bucketfuls to the square yard that it was almost impossible to see farther than a yard or so ahead.

When the rain first started Richard Verrell was in his favorite haunt—Hyde Park.

At first the rain did not impede his brisk walk. He was dressed suitably, and ordinary rain never worried him.

But his stoicism was not proof against the cloudburst. Having had one bath that day he did not feel in need of another. He ran hell for leather to the nearest tree, and there took what shelter he could.

He was not the only one to select that particular tree. There was already a girl there—at least that is what the slimness of her ankles and legs made him think she was.

From the waist up she was hidden by an umbrella, which she held not over her, but in front of her, facing the wind.

The rain ceased as suddenly as

Bruce Graeme, Vice President of the Crime Writers Association in England, while author of more than forty other books and novels, is perhaps best known for his Blackshirt novels, two of which, BLACKSHIRT *and* THE RETURN OF BLACKSHIRT, *have each sold more than 300,000 copies in England.*

it had begun. Just as Verrell was about to continue his walk a sudden gust of wind swept under the tree.

He felt his sodden hat blowing off. He swung round, made a grab for it, saved it. Then he saw that the same gust had all but torn the umbrella from the girl's grasp. In her struggle her face was exposed.

It was a pretty face, and strangely familiar to him.

He tried to obtain a second glimpse, but she mastered the umbrella, and still holding it so that he could not see her face, she left the tree and commenced to walk across the sodden ground toward Marble Arch.

He decided to follow her example. As he stepped forward he remembered suddenly why her face was familiar.

He had seen her photograph in the newspapers only that morning. She was Norma Waley, secretary to a successful publisher. Apparently she had been missing from her home for more than a week. The police had been unable to trace her.

As Verrell followed the hurrying figure ahead he chuckled at the vagaries of fate. For several days police constables all over the kingdom had been on the look-out for the girl Norma. She had successfully eluded them. Then, in the middle of Hyde Park, with only one other person within the radius of a mile or so, a sudden puff of wind had, for a fleeting moment, wrenched her umbrella to one side, and her whereabouts was no longer a secret.

Gradually, the smile vanished from Verrell's lips. He was vaguely surprised to discover that Norma Waley was in the heart of London, alive and well. The newspapers had been hinting at a possible mystery, and inferring that no surprise would be experienced in some quarters if her body were found in some out of the way place. Yet here she was, walking across the park in a perfectly normal manner. She must know, from the newspapers, that the police were anxious to find her. Why had she not reported to them? Why, indeed, had she disappeared?

Once again Verrell laughed. It occurred to him that, of late, he was becoming very curious about other people's affairs. Thinking back over the events of the past few weeks he realized that he had several times investigated matters, in which he had no possible concern, merely to satisfy his curiosity. Well, why not? he asked himself. He had done no harm. Indeed, he had actually done some good. This thought suggested another. His eyes brightened with that boyish, mischievous light which was characteristic of him.

Why not satisfy his curiosity yet once more? The rain had practically stopped, he had no engagement that night—why should he

not try to learn Norma Waley's present address, and perhaps the reason for her disappearance?

So it came about that when Norma arrived at a small house in Acton, and let herself in with a latch-key, Verrell was not far away, and was already planning how he should break into the house some hours later.

Norma dreamed she was in the country, taking part in a picnic. Flies were the only bother. They would not leave her in peace. They buzzed round her face, alighted on her face, crept into her nose, and tickled her unbearably.

At last she awoke. The candle by her bedside was alight. Sitting on the end of her bed was a man dressed in black from head to foot.

Alarmed, she opened her mouth to shriek her fear, but he acted more quickly. Bending forward, he placed his gloved hand over her mouth.

"It's all right, Norma. You have nothing to worry about," he whispered.

As she heard the mention of her name an expression of still greater fear entered her eyes. He felt her body tremble. Slowly he removed his hand.

"What are you doing here?" she gasped presently. "Who are you?"

"I know who I am, of course," Blackshirt replied merrily. "But to be perfectly frank, I scarcely know why I am here. I had a mad impulse to come here tonight—and here I am."

There was a quality in his voice that was reassuring. Her trembling subsided. "How do you know who I am? How did you know I was here?"

"I recognized you while you were out walking this afternoon and—I followed you here."

"Oh! Are you a detective?"

Blackshirt chuckled. "Not in these clothes." The laughter faded from his voice. "Are you afraid of the police?"

"Please don't ask me questions," she pleaded.

"So that is why you have been in hiding, although you know all England is on the look-out for you. What have you done, Norma?"

"Nothing, nothing!" she answered quickly. "I mean—oh! I am not going to say a word."

Her denial had been so automatic, so genuine, that Blackshirt believed her. But if she had done nothing to make her fear the police, why was she hiding from them, why had she imagined that he was a detective? With a critical eye he inspected the girl.

She was young, not beautiful, but extremely pleasant in appearance. She had bright hazel eyes, naturally wavy hair. From her appearance it was difficult to believe her guilty of serious crime.

"You are in trouble of some sort?" he said, suddenly.

"No—yes—why are you here?"

"To ask you why you have disappeared from your work and your home."

"What business is it of yours?" she asked with some spirit.

"None," he replied calmly. "I have told you I acted on a mad impulse. Now I am glad that I did so."

"Why?"

"Because perhaps I can be of help to you."

"There is nothing you can do."

"Why not tell me everything?"

"No," she answered obstinately.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Very well, I shall tell the police where you are."

She sat up and clutched at him frantically. "Please don't do that. Please, please. Not for another week at any rate."

"Then will you tell me why you disappeared, and let me help you if I can?"

"How can you help me?" she asked dully.

"Why did you disappear?" he persisted.

She sighed. "Because I love Julian Jackson."

Vaguely he seemed to recognize the name.

"He is an author," she explained.

Her prompting refreshed his memory. Julian Jackson was an author of the younger school. He had produced two books which had met with a favorable reception. A successful future was promised for him.

"Well?"

"Julian is still poor," she said sadly. "At least, until next week. Then he will be receiving a check from America for some stories he has written, and some of his troubles will be over."

"So it's Julian's troubles you are bearing on your shoulders?"

"Yes," she admitted in a small voice. "At the moment Julian is still working for the firm I am in. He is in the accounts department. About a week ago his brother cabled from Australia, saying he must have one hundred pounds immediately. Julian had only thirty pounds in the bank.

"He—he—borrowed the other seventy from the firm, meaning to repay it when his money arrives from New York. The next day the chartered accountants wrote to say they were sending one of their clerks to check the books."

"Was somebody suspicious of Julian?"

"No. The accountants make periodic, surprise visits. Julian was terrified at the thought of being found out. He was afraid the firm might prosecute, and he believed the scandal would ruin his literary career. That is why I disappeared."

"I don't understand."

"As private secretary to Mr. Jacobs I had an equal opportunity of stealing the money. I thought that if I disappeared the account-

ants would think I had stolen the money. They would not be suspicious of Julian."

"But what of your reputation?" Blackshirt asked angrily. "Was Julian willing to let your reputation be ruined in order to save his own?"

"You don't understand," she protested angrily.

"You see, he got the seventy pounds from a friend on the security of a certified bearer check received by the firm a week ago. With the money from America he was going to buy back the check from his friend, and then 'accidentally' find it in the office. A few days later I intended to return to the office and say I had lost my memory. Then everything would have been all right, and next year Julian and I could have been married."

Suddenly she burst into tears. "Now all our plans have gone wrong."

"What has happened?"

"Julian forgot to hide the letter enclosing the check. The accountant found it last thing last night. Tomorrow there is to be a thorough search of the office for the missing check. Of course, it won't be found, and now it will be impossible for Julian to 'pretend' to find it. Everybody will suspect him of having made use of it."

"But isn't that precisely what he is doing?"

Choking with sobs, Norma did not reply.

Her grief disturbed Blackshirt. He believed her story.

It seemed a pity that two lives were to be spoiled because the accountants had chosen such an inconvenient moment to go through the publishers' books.

All at once something occurred to him.

"What is the name and address of the friend who lent Julian the money and who now holds the certified check?"

Sobbingly Norma gave him the required information.

Blackshirt left the house where Norma was staying as easily as he had entered it—by means of the drawing-room window. Before venturing into the street he crouched behind the privet hedge which hid the small front garden from the road. The hour was neither late nor early, so he was not surprised when he had to wait for nearly fifteen minutes before his eyes and ears warned him that it was safe to leave the friendly cover.

Once on the pavement he walked firmly toward the all-night garage where he had left his car. He took it out and drove home. There he put the car away for the night in the garage which was immediately underneath his flat in Notting Hill. He entered his rooms and retired to his study. He was not there long, however. From the study he proceeded to the bedroom. There he took off

his lounge suit and put on his evening clothes. When he had redressed he left the flat, but not by the rainwater spout which led into the garage yard below his bedroom window, a route he sometimes used. He let himself out of the front door, walked the few yards to the main road, and there hailed a late-going taxi which he ordered to take him to Piccadilly.

Anyone observing the man dressed in immaculate evening clothes who entered a taxi would almost certainly have assumed that he was off to spend the rest of the night in riotous living.

At Piccadilly Blackshirt paid off the taxi. Then he walked round the corner and engaged another.

"Hampstead," he told the man. Believing that he was taking home a man who had spent a merry evening in the West End the taxi-driver blissfully made his way to the required address.

Blackshirt walked into the gardens of a large block of modern flats and disappeared behind one of the wings.

The taxi drove off again. Blackshirt returned to the road, and lurching slightly as though he was partially intoxicated, proceeded to a certain address about half a mile distant.

Then, for the second time that night, he broke into a private house.

The following morning Hagen Jacobs, publisher, held a conference in his private office with a Mr. Stubbs, partner in a firm of chartered accountants.

"You say, Mr. Stubbs, that last night you found a letter from Messrs. Hesketh and Company of Australia apparently enclosing an order for books, together with a certified bearer check in settlement?"

"That is so, Mr. Jacobs."

"The check arrived by registered mail as usual, I suppose? Do you know when?"

"Nine days ago."

"And the check has not been paid into the bank?"

"No."

"Although the books have been dispatched to Hesketh and Company?"

Stubbs nodded. "That is the position."

"Have you any idea why the check was not paid in?"

"It was too late last night to make inquiries, Mr. Jacobs. Through an oversight, somebody may have forgotten to pay it in in the normal way. On the other hand—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Somebody may have converted it to their own use," Jacobs finished angrily. "Miss Waley, for instance. She opens the correspondence. That would explain her disappearance, wouldn't it? I have been wondering what the explanation was."

"Before we accuse her of theft

I think we should confirm that the check has been stolen," Stubbs pointed out, mildly. "Have I your permission to conduct a search for the missing check, Mr. Jacobs?"

"Of course. I will call in Jackson."

Presently a white-faced Jackson entered.

"Jackson," Jacobs said, abruptly. "Do you know anything of the last bearer check from Hesketh of Australia?"

"Yes, sir," Jackson said nervously. "What is it you want to know?"

"You know it hasn't yet been paid into the bank?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why not?"

"I haven't received it yet," he gasped. "It hasn't reached our department."

Jacobs angrily thumped his clenched fist on the table. "It was Miss Waley's business to pass that check on to Jackson, Stubbs. I tell you, she has stolen that check. That is why she disappeared so strangely."

"Oh, no, sir," Jackson gasped desperately. "I'm sure Miss Waley couldn't have stolen a check, sir."

"Why not?" Jacobs demanded.

"Because — because —" Jackson's courage failed him. "Is it possible that the check has somehow got mixed up in your own papers, sir?"

"Ridiculous!" Jacobs stormed. "Where could it be, for instance?"

"In—in—one of your drawers, perhaps," the unhappy Jackson stuttered.

"Nonsense. I have opened most of my drawers a dozen times in the past week."

He saw Stubbs looking remonstratingly at him. "Oh! Very well," he growled. "I'll look, if only to satisfy you it isn't here."

He pulled open the central drawer of his table. He took out letters, scraps of papers, draft contracts, advertising matter, and then—suddenly—a piece of paper, the size of a check.

"Well, I'm damned!" he growled.

Jackson stared at the check. It couldn't be there—it couldn't be—it couldn't be! The days of miracles were long over.

And yet—he rubbed his eyes, surreptitiously pinched himself—but it was still there!

It is doubtful, however, whether Jackson's amazement was more considerable than that of his friend who had put the check in his safe, to hold it as security for money lent.

To this day that friend believes in miracles. Why shouldn't he?

How, otherwise, was he to account for a certified bearer check for £70 which transformed itself, overnight, into seventy crisp one-pound notes!

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts, novels that you'll wish to relax with, and others —documentaries of our times.

WHILE Maurice Procter's latest suspense novel, THE MIDNIGHT PLUMBER (Harper, $2.95) hasn't got the impact of his THE PUB CRAWLER, one of the best novels this column read last year, here is—again—an effectively told story of police procedure, concentrating not so much on one personality—Chief Inspector Martineau—as, blessedly so, on the different people working with him and against him, their weaknesses and their strength.

There has been a tendency in British crime fiction, as for that matter in much of our own writing, to suggest that violence and the urge to mayhem are essentially middle-class vices, acting on a theory which I wouldn't care to elaborate on at this time. The few departures from this approach, mostly on our side of the Atlantic, have felt it necessary to translate these asocial urges into basic English and, for that matter, elementary psychiatric jargon on the level of a current paper back best seller. Procter's previous novel, THE PUB CRAWLER, was a welcome departure from this intellectual snobbery, and here again, in

While our friend over on the Saint's Ratings *desk is taking a brief and well earned vacation—he'll be back next month with further reports on often somewhat uninhibited excursions into mayhem—we return with the following report on current and recent suspense-cum-mystery novels.*

THE MIDNIGHT PLUMBER (the man who calls himself "the plumber" is the leader of a gang), we have a vivid group of people, very much alive, and part and parcel of a distinct social fabric. I've had a tendency, from time to time, to bore people with my insistence that many novels (including, in this country, the work of writers like the Gordons and Doris Miles Disney) could be described as social portraits of our times, which may possibly be studied as such by historians in some dim future, assuming copies of these novels should survive until then. Procter's novels definitely belong in this category. Strongly recommended.

Superintendent Roderick Alleyn finds himself, rather unexpectedly, hunting a murderer on a cruise to Africa in Ngaio Marsh's just published SINGING IN THE SHROUDS (Little Brown, $3.50). Alleyn is his charming, observant, and politely British self, and his fellow passengers are satisfactorily complicated, particularly so the obvious candidate for the murderer's gentle attentions. Yes, the gentleman is on board. . . .

Harold Q. Masur's newest Scott Jordan novel, THE LAST GAMBLE (Simon & Schuster, $2.95), has the young lawyer, a consistent catalyst for violence, involved in a Broadway comedy built around an actor with a penchant for getting into trouble. Eventually fatal trouble. There are a number of rather decorative characters—a poor little rich girl who falls in love with a father image—and Vickie, who it appears is going to be seeing a good deal of Scott in the future. It's about time that young man settles down, after all. Fast moving. Pleasant.

Genevieve Holden's SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO KATE (Doubleday, $2.95), describes what happens to a cloistered mouse when attention is finally paid to her. Life *can* get exciting. . . .

The title is nominated as the understatement of the year.

Andrew Garve's THE NARROW SEARCH (Harper, $2.95), recaptures some of the uniqueness of background and beautiful characterization which made the writer's earlier FONTEGO'S FOLLY such an excellent novel, and which have been absent in his more recent formulae excursions into restrained violence. When Clare Hunter leaves her extremely unpleasant husband he hits on what seems to him (and has seemed to others, in the past) a highly satisfactory way of paying her back. He kidnaps their young child, under the impression that this will make Clare return to him, insisting, when sent to prison (for another reason) that

Clare will never find their daughter. How she does, and in the course of doing so discovers a different aspect of England, makes an attractively told story. Recommended.

Leigh Brackett's THE TIGER AMONG US (Doubleday, $2.95) was, as many of you will remember, an excellent study of a subject we all have a tendency to assume belongs only in the tabloids and not around the corner from us—the senseless urge to violence of today's juvenile delinquent. Here, by way of contrast, in AN EYE FOR AN EYE (Doubleday, $2.95), is not an angry study of a state of mind, but a portrait of a sick mentality as it struggles to hit back at the world through a senseless kidnapping. Interesting.

Those who remember Henry Brinton's previous novel, DRUG ON THE MARKET, will welcome his new novel about the irrepressible John Strang, M.P., with his distinct flair for investigation. COPPERS AND GOLD (Macmillan, $3.25) deals with the efforts of a police inspector with the regrettable nickname of "Fillet" to catch the people involved in what is described as a Chicago-style train robbery. The Honorable Mr. Strang's fourteen-year-old daughter, Sally, contributes a good deal to making this rather pleasant reading.

E. C. Lorac is one of those careful craftsmen so characteristic of British crime fiction, their novels often social documentaries of our times, their characters minutely drawn, to the last wrinkle, to the last idiosyncracy, *and* at the same time seldom seeming contrived.

There is a quality of naturalness and a credibility to their characters, woefully lacking in the equally carefully plotted (and at times rather plodding) American imitations of this technique. Lorac's PEOPLE WILL TALK (Doubleday, $2.95) is based squarely upon this fact that people—in small communities as well as elsewhere—*will* talk when the husband who is assumed to have married his wife for her money returns to their home without her, telling an unconvincing story that she is coming back later. When she then fails to do so, people *will* talk. . . . Recommended.

It is no secret, by now, that J. J. Marric, author of the series about Gideon of the Yard, is in reality John Creasey. The latest Marric novel, GIDEON'S NIGHT (Harper, $2.95), while perhaps not as beautifully effective as the first novel in the series, GIDEON'S DAY, was still a warmly human and excitingly told story of the men who guard over sleeping London.

This is a must if you haven't read it as yet.

Another novel which this column hopes you didn't miss is The Gordons' CAPTIVE (Doubleday, $2.95), not so much because it is the story of the relentless hunt for two killers, aging Joe Barnes and trigger-happy Marv, across the barren, lonely wasteland that is the Arizona desert, but because it is a long overdue tribute to a group of law enforcement officers seldom met with in this field, the Navaho police. It's to be hoped that we'll hear again about Captain Hosteen Chuska, who heads Number Four Police District of Law and Order. Strongly recommended.

On the other hand, I am afraid I was less enthusiastic about Howard Browne's newest novel about Paul Pine, THE TASTE OF ASHES (Simon & Schuster, $2.95); about John Bingham's slightly less than exciting MURDER OFF THE RECORD (Dodd Mead, $2.95); and Manning Stokes' THE CASE OF THE JUDAS SPOON (Arcadia, $2.75), perhaps because I couldn't quite believe in Christopher Fenn.

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chi-ca'-go

by . . . Arthur Porges and Francis Raymond

The little girl's voice was trembling. She didn't like it there and wanted to come home. When was this to be?

IT WAS a cheap little recording, inexpertly cut with non-professional equipment, but three people listened to its brief message with disproportionate emotion.

After vague background noises and the insistent murmur of men conferring, a quavering, childish plea: "Mommy, come and get me. I don't luh-like it here." There was the beginning of a whimper, broken off with suspicious curtness. A few final mutterings; a brief, whispered argument; a woman's harsh, threatening voice; then silence. Scratch, scratch, scratch went the record, tiresomely repeating its last blind groove under the needle.

Inspector King stopped the turntable, looked down at the plastic disc, and his lips narrowed grimly. But when he turned to the couple, his voice was soft.

"You must remember I have no official standing in this country. None at all."

"We know," the woman said dully. "But the note says that if we tell the police . . . I'm so afraid," she added, "that this might be the only way we'll ever hear Linda's voice again."

Here is one of the most unique kidnapping stories that we have run across. Arthur Porges and Francis Raymond, two Los Angeles writers, describe a kidnapping in one part of the country that is solved by retired Inspector King of Scotland Yard with the aid of a scientist and the telephone.

"Look, Jim," the man said. "We have perhaps twenty-four hours—maybe a little more—until they tell us how to give the money. Shirlee and I thought it was just possible you might have an idea." His voice trembled a little. "It's been plain murder keeping it to ourselves all week. The neighbors think Linda's at her aunt's. It isn't the money, either."

"You intend to pay, then?"

"What else can we do?" the man gritted. "Oh, we can raise the twenty thousand, all right. They know that; they've checked up somehow. This is no hasty job. I'll have to beggar myself, but we'll make it. The trouble is . . ." He left the remark unfinished, but King knew what was implied. Would they get Linda back alive even after paying?

King frowned, his heavy jaw muscles cording. He picked up the letter and scrutinized it again. Cheap paper from a pad, the sort you were lucky to pin down to a single state in weeks of leg work. Postmarked Chicago, but that meant nothing. The child had been gone a week, and the note had arrived the very day she vanished. By now she could be in New York or Washington—or Mexico. It was so easy to get about in this country. They could have driven, and the most suspicious eye have seen only a typical family group: father, mother, uncle perhaps, or brother-in-law—and a weary child, dozing. Some harmless sedative would assure Linda's silence.

If he knew where they were—but that was absurd. Only exact information, literally the very house where she was being held, would do. Knowing a city wouldn't help a bit. Start a big hue-and-cry, and they'd kill the girl, just as the letter warned. She might already be dead. The record could have been made a week ago. Kidnappers are more callous than most criminals, King reflected. The victim, if not a mere infant, always talks, describes, remembers; and the way laws are now, there isn't so much to lose by adding a murder to the original crime.

He glanced at the distraught couple, locking his teeth in impotent fury. They had waited a week—days of purgatory—after the note arrived with such directions. And now, today, the record to soften them up completely. The criminals were certainly doing a cool, well-planned job. Grab the kid, muzzle the parents, skip away to some other part of the country, and arrange a sure-fire method of collecting the ransom. The letter said that directions about paying would come tomorrow. Getting the money was always a ticklish business, now that the police had planes, helicopters, and other devices for tracking down a contact man from the pay-off spot.

Well, the police were out of it, thanks to first the note and now this terrifying little recording, a

final turn of the screw. In any case, since the parents were committed to silence, and could do nothing for twenty-four hours, no harm could be done by a bit of cautious meddling on his part. Horwell of the Yard, his famed colleague, had always stressed the importance of acting on a fresh scent; the record, at least, was new.

"I'll do what I can," he said heavily, feeling all of his sixty-two years, fearing that he no longer had that specialized awareness, that almost intuitive knack accruing to a professional practicing his subtle art daily. "But the advantage is all with the kidnappers; you realize that. We can't risk the child. Even if we knew a neighborhood in a city—knew for certain to within a few blocks where she was being held, it would be chancy to start a search. They'd spot us coming, perhaps, get panicky, and . . ." He broke off, knowing there was no point in putting the obvious into words. "No, only a lightning raid on the hideout itself would do the job. But let me think the whole thing over this afternoon." He escorted them to the door, laid one big-knuckled hand briefly on the woman's shoulder, and watched them walk to their car.

Back in his small study, the inspector sank into a worn armchair. A gusty sigh escaped his lips. Just what did they expect of him? The magic name of Scotland Yard plus all those yarns about his past triumphs had led them to believe in miracles. They forgot that those cases pertained to his prime; that he'd had at his disposal all the facilities of a great organization: laboratories, experts —Spilsbury alone was a legion. Would he ever forget Sir Bernard's devastation of that flamboyant pathologist from — King brought himself up short, horrified at this wool-gathering, which tended to confirm his feeling of incompetence.

Better think about Horwell and the hot scent. King rose, went to the phonograph, turned the volume up, and played the record again. The woman's words flitted through his mind, and he thought: don't want to wear this out; Shirlee may be right, and never hear that voice again. The Lorets were comparatively recent friends, but he felt a great fondness for them. Peter, with his alert, ironic face, and the lovely, artistic Shirlee. And above all, Linda, the shy, the adorable—a pang went through him at the thought of his own six-year-old, killed in the blitz a thousand years ago.

The raucous disc ground to a halt, and he stood there wondering. What good was this doing? A meaningless gesture. Almost two; not many hours left. Another letter would arrive tomorrow. Maybe he should tell them to risk calling in the F.B.I. A terrible decision to make, with all the cards stacked on the side of evil.

Who was that silly idiot chanting "Chi-ca'-go!"? Chanting? Who was chanting, and why Chicago?

With a hand that shook slightly, Inspector King started the record again. This time he put the volume control as high as it would go, deliberately listening past the child's distorted soprano to catch the background noises. By Heaven—it was so! Somebody was actually crying "Chi-ca'go! Chi-ca'-go!" on the record. Was that meant to be a message? Who would do such a thing? Were the Lorets supposed to infer that Linda was being held in Chicago? And if so, if this were a friendly tip by one of the criminals, what good would such information be? Chicago was an enormous city.

He played the disc once more, listening carefully. There was something not quite human about that call; a queer sort of timbre. King bit his lip, stood for a moment, gave a sharp exclamation, snatched up the record, and ran out of the apartment.

Fifteen minutes later he stood before a door marked: "Walter Hutchins, Assistant Director, Hillman Museum." All about, throngs of people were passing, engrossed in well-planned exhibits, but to King they were invisible.

With a hasty rap on the frosted glass, he opened the door and charged in. The short, white-haired man working at a littered table jumped up beaming. He transferred a soldering iron from his right hand to his left, and wrung the inspector's fingers. But King cut the amenities short. Before him was an expert ideally qualified to implement that hunch about the strange chant. The room was one clutter of electronic gadgets: tape recorders, amplifiers, parabolic reflectors, and similar audio devices. For Hutchins' specialty was capturing the voices of nature. Insects, frogs, birds, even fish—they all had their characteristic sounds, and it was his delight to get them down on records which were eagerly bought by schools as well as interested individuals.

"Hutch," King snapped, "run this off on a good machine!"

The other gaped at him, then seeing the set of his jaw, raised a quizzical eyebrow and took the disc. A glance at the grooves told him what he wanted to know; he set the speed at seventy-eight RPM's, and in a few deft motions had the record hissing under a needle.

Hutchins listened in bewilderment to the thin, girlish tones, and was about to speak, when King waved him to silence.

"There, you hear that? That 'Chi-ca'-go!' sound? Mean anything to you?"

The expert grinned.

"Are you kidding? That's a California quail; no other bird uses a call remotely like that—nary one! But wait a minute." He stopped the turntable. "If that's what

you want, I can do better. I'll cut out all the talking." He made some adjustments, increased the volume, and started the record again. This time the voices were a faint murmur; the quail dominated. Hutch leaned forward. Between the chanting call there were other sounds: twitters, chirps, and one rippling song.

"Others on there, too," he told King. "Finches, song sparrows, and—say. That one's really a ringer! Get it? That long, sweet warble? It has me stopped." He peered owlishly at the inspector, and the smile left his face. "For Heaven's sake, what's wrong?"

"I guess you haven't been listening to the record."

"Listening to—the devil I haven't! A little girl talking to her mother. You asked about the quail. What's going on, anyway?"

"I'll tell you," King said bitterly; and dropping into a chair, he did so.

As the inspector spoke, Hutchins' mild eyes became steely. When King had finished, the ornithologist said, "I wish I could help; but just what are you trying to accomplish with—?" He gestured towards the phonograph.

"Look," the other said. "Did you mean what you said about that sound being from a California quail? And does that 'California' part mean what it seems to?"

"Damn right. California or Southern Oregon, maybe—but a hundred to one, California."

"And the others?" King demanded, his eyes bright.

"California, too, but also most of the West."

"Then we've had it," was the gloomy reply. "California's a bit too big."

"Unless," Hutch reminded him "that last one should help us pin it down. Any bird that I don't know must be rare—mighty rare, believe me. And that means a restricted range. See what that leads to?"

King nodded vigorously. "Who *could* identify it, and in a hurry?"

"A good question. Roger Peterson's out of the country right now. Hmm. I think I know just the man, but he's mighty far away—California. Name's Bill Lockwood. He lives in Laguna Beach, and if there's any Western bird he doesn't know, it has neither wings nor feathers." Both men were silent for a few moments, then Hutch gave his friend a sharp scrutiny.

"Jim," he said, "I've a rather crazy idea, but maybe it's worth a try. Bill has the sharpest ear the other side of the Rockies, and even over the phone . . . phones these days are pretty hi fi, you know."

King showed his surprise plainly, but he was a man of quick decision.

"Let's give it a try," he said tersely. "There's no other way, it seems."

Over two thousand miles of wire Lockwood's voice came in

with calm assurance. Not even their amazing request shattered his aplomb. With the volume so high that people in the corridor outside paused to gape at the closed door, they played the scratchy disc five times, sending chirps, twitters, and warbles across the continent while King's teeth ached under the pressure of his clenched jaws.

"Get anything out of it?" Hutch demanded eagerly.

"You hear the finches and song sparrows," Lockwood's voice said metallically.

"What do you take me for!" was the indignant retort. "Quit stalling, Bill. Who's the warbler? If you don't know, we're kaputt."

"It's almost a miracle that I *do* know. There can't be a dozen in the world who'd recognize that song."

King leaned forward.

"It's rare as hell," Lockwood said smugly. "A Bendire Thrasher. Ever hear of it?"

"Of course!" Hutch snapped. "But as for knowing its song—not a chance. But look, Bill, how about the range?"

"Ah," was the reply. "That's why nobody hears it. There's literally only one place to find that bird in California—"

"Would there be quail there?" King blurted.

"Who's that?" Lockwood demanded.

"Never mind," Hutch said. "Bill, if you heard California quail and the thrasher, where might you be? That's what we need to know, and fast."

There was silence for perhaps twenty seconds, then Lockwood drawled, "A very neat question—with a perfect answer. The only place you'd hear both is in a piddling little region right where the San Bernadino Mountains dip into the desert. Plenty of quail in those foothills, and rarely—oh, mighty rarely—a Bendire Thrasher."

"That's wonderful news, Bill. And will you let me explain by mail? Right now we've some very important fish to fry—in other words, son, now that we've picked your brains, get off the line! But first, one more pick—what's it like in quail-thrasher territory? Well settled? Towns?"

"No, sir! I know the spot. A few scattered houses; most of them empty this time of the year."

"Good enough!" Hutch said with enthusiasm. "Thanks a million, Bill, and good-bye for now." He hung up.

"I see what you're thinking of," King said slowly. "If the F.B.I. were quietly called in to have a look at what few houses are occupied in that small area . . . It's still a gamble, but a lot better one. Only if the Lorets agree."

The Lorets did agree, and the F.B.I. did their usual professional job. The little plastic record is now among Inspector King's souvenirs. And Linda, a darling of eight, calls him "Uncle Jim."

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